

Cold Tea

Story: Cold Tea

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10942632/1/>

Category: Fire Emblem

Genre: Romance/Hurt/Comfort

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Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/6385916/>

Last updated: 10/18/2015

Words: 193565

Rating: T

Status: In Progress

Content: Chapter 1 to 24 of 24 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: "I have it easy, because I don't have to forget," Robin continued, looking back at her. "People like us, we have to make new happy memories to replace the old, and find new things to smile about." Lucina struggles to choose between her mission for the greater good and her own feelings. A Robin and Lucina fanfic that very generally follows the arc of the second half of the game.

***Chapter 1*: Remember to Smile**

Hello, all! Just a few things about this story before I begin...

This is my attempt at a legit(?) Robin and Lucina fic, so if you happen to enjoy that pairing then hopefully this will be the story for you! Ever since Robin and Lucina were both announced for Smash Bros and after watching their support conversations (especially the DLC Hot Spring Scramble one - it's adorable if they're married), I've gotten really into this pairing and felt the need to write something about it with all of the ideas swimming in my head. I think it adds a whole new deeper element to the plot of Awakening by pairing these two, so I enjoy it because of the conflict it brings up.

I aim to follow the general plot progression throughout the second half of Awakening, starting a little before the attack on Walhart and Valm Castle, but adding in a bunch of little scenes of my own. I'm also planning to do scenes after the game is completed, kinda like an epilogue of sorts. Should be about 20-ish chapters when it's done and hopefully more.

I hope to keep it regularly updated as long as time regarding high school permits, so be sure to stay tuned!

EDIT: The chapter has been updated with less grammar fixes and slight changes that will hopefully make the story flow better!

In which Robin talks about his family and Lucina awkwardly watches him eat

Chapter 1 – Remember to Smile

Robin stood by the flap of the mess tent as the Shepards piled in for dinner, all eager for a full meal after their most recent battle. The warm rays of the sun were losing their intensity as night took hold over camp. It was sort of a habit that Robin had developed, likely stemming from his tactician duties, to keep watch over everyone. If the Shepards were a band of misfits, they were a close knit band of misfits, and not a single one could be defined as a "normal" soldier. All of the Shepards were unique in their own ways; even Stahl, who called himself average, had quirks that made him who he was. After fighting alongside someone in a life or death situation, it was hard not to get along. These relationships were what gave the Shepards their strength: everyone looked out for one another, and no one was left to die on the battlefield if it could be helped. Robin always checked after every skirmish that everyone made it back alive and safe. Even now with the dire stakes of Valmese campaign, the nostalgic feeling of fighting off simple street thugs with the original Shepards still remained strong.

Robin reminded himself to mentally add one more member to the army's ranks tonight. The Shepards had discovered Lissa's theatrical future son Owain in the Sage's Hamlet, who promptly joined them once he recognized his parents. There was also something about "steadying his sword hand," but Robin had yet to discover what that meant. To Robin, the heartwarming reunion between parent and child was such a beautiful sight. Lissa was crying joyful tears for ten minutes straight when the realization that she was a mother finally sank in, and her son was just as happy to see her again. Despite the fact that their parents didn't even know their future children yet, the familial connection was still there, a bond that transcended the rivers of time. Robin made sure to double his efforts to keep the Shepards out of harm's way every time one of the future children arrived. If he put any of the parents in a risky situation and they fell in battle, he would be responsible for the children having to relive their parents' deaths all over again. He would never be able to forgive himself. Even though he knew the Shepards were his family, Robin briefly wondered what that feeling actually was, to be a parent. The very notion of him having a child arrive from the future was impossible anyway, so he pushed the thought out of his mind.

He ran through the list in his mind of all the names of those who had passed him. Everyone was accounted for, except one: Lucina had not shown up to eat again. She rarely ever came and barely spoke when she did, and it seemed like she only appeared to reassure Chrom that she was indeed eating and not starving to death. Robin glanced over what he could glimpse of the campsite, scanning to see if she was just running late, but like he expected Lucina failed to appear. Was she not getting along with the rest of the group? The other future children seemed to acclimate just fine within a few days, easily integrating and finding their places within the Shepards' ranks. Lucina had been a part of the army the longest of all of them, but she didn't appear to be adjusting well in comparison. Robin sighed at the thought. He knew that she liked her space, but not eating for long periods of time wasn't healthy. After poking his head briefly into the mess tent both to give Chrom a silent indication he would join them in a little while and to make one more final check that everyone else was accounted for, Robin set out to search for the elusive young woman.

Fortunately, Robin was not completely in the dark regarding the habits of the blue-haired princess. He knew that Lucina spent much of her free time practicing her swordplay, so he decided to check the training field first. The clash of metal

striking metal confirmed his assumption. Getting close enough so that he could view the field in its entirety, he caught sight of Lucina slashing away at a practice dummy. Her skill with her sword, the Falchion that paralleled the one owned by Chrom in this timeline, was spectacular, easily far superior to his own and definitely a match for that of Lon'qu's. If Lon'qu wasn't such a gynophobe, he would probably be challenging her to sparring matches constantly.

Robin couldn't help but be mesmerized by the strength and determination that Lucina conveyed with every swing of her weapon. One could learn quite a bit about someone's personality from their fighting style, a technique that he had become quite good at given the colorful diversity of the Shepards, but Lucina's was especially hard to pin down. She was relentless, hacking away at her helpless target as if she had an intense quarrel with it, yet every attack was remarkably controlled and accurate, allowing her to connect her blows with little to no error.

One part of him didn't want to interrupt her devoted endeavor to annihilate what was left of the training dummy, but Robin figured that Lucina getting a proper meal first was more important. Trying to approach obviously as to not startle the girl, Robin called out to her.

"If that dummy could speak it would be begging for mercy," he joked.

Lucina instantly grew tense and whirled around, blade ready to fight off an intruder, but she dropped her fighting stance when she realized it was no foe.

"Oh, hello Robin." Lucina sighed, sheathing Falchion. "Don't sneak up on me like that when I'm training," she scolded. "If you had been any closer, I probably would have assumed you to be an enemy."

"Sorry! I tried to be as conspicuous as I could, but I guess I wasn't good enough," Robin grinned. "I must be hanging around Kellam too much," he joked in an attempt to lighten the mood, but was only met by a blank gaze. Whether she found the joke unamusing or she just didn't get it Robin couldn't tell, but he made a mental note not to crack another one.

"What brings you here at this hour?" the girl asked, sitting down on a large crate to catch her breath. "Shouldn't you be eating with the others?"

"That's actually why I came. I wanted to bring you to have some dinner with us. You don't show up that often, and I'm worried you aren't getting enough to eat," he explained.

Lucina frowned, her brow furrowed as if in thought, and she broke eye contact with him, taking a sudden interest in a small rock on the ground. "I... am fine," she hesitated, shuffling the rock in between her feet. "I eat enough to sustain myself. My father knows. I do not have time for a large meal."

"Well that's just insane!" Robin exclaimed. Lucina turned towards him again in surprise. "You can't practically starve yourself when we have more than enough food!" he argued. "It's not healthy! You're going to work yourself to death!"

"I assure you I can manage, Robin. I need to focus on my training," Lucina responded definitively. She got up off the crate and took a few steps away in an attempt to end the conversation there, trying to avoid Robin's gaze.

"You can take a break, you know," Robin softened his tone, recognizing that she was clearly unsettled by his comment. "Everyone needs rest."

Lucina stood in silence for a moment, then finally replied. "Not me. I cannot afford it," she said firmly.

"Lucina..." Robin attempted to argue.

"Really, I'm fine," she cut him off. "I appreciate your concern for me, but I really must get back to work."

Robin frowned, annoyed that he was unable to convince her otherwise, but he wasn't the kind of person to admit defeat so easily either. The tactician in him kicked into high gear, and he quickly formulated a new approach to the problem.

"I guess I'll go and grab a bite to eat then myself. I'll see you around," he threw his hands up in mock failure as he turned to leave.

"Goodbye, Robin," the girl replied distractedly, already focused on assembling a new sparring target.

Lucina gritted her teeth and imagined her target to be a much more threatening foe as she assumed her battle stance, which she had modeled off of her father's but had altered slightly to fit her smaller body frame. Holding Falchion close to her face, she glared at the dummy with a burning intensity, the image of one of the walking corpses that haunted her future materializing in her mind. *It's just one more Risen*, she told herself. One less monster that could bring harm to her

friends. One little step closer to protecting them. This was why she was here, why she had been sent to this world. Nothing would stop her second chance. Pointing Falchion's tip directly at her target's chest, she lunged forward.

"Lucina!"

"Gah!" she shouted, losing her focus and skidding to halt. She turned around in annoyance to search for whoever had called her. "Not while I'm... Robin?" Sure enough, it was Robin again, striding towards her holding two trays of food. "I thought you left to eat dinner with everyone."

"No way. Not while someone I know is working hard. So I figured that if you wouldn't come to dinner, I'd have to bring the dinner to you!" he held out one of the trays he was carrying to her, smiling triumphantly.

Lucina stared at him, more curious than angry. Did he really care that much? She caught a whiff of the steaming meal held out right under her nose, and her mouth began to water a little. It did look really good. *Gods, I must look like an utter fool, drooling over some food*, Lucina reprimanded herself.

"I guess... I'm a little bit hungry," she admitted. She was slowly reaching out to take the tray from him when her stomach let out a growl far too loud for their quiet surroundings, causing her cheeks to turn bright pink in embarrassment.

"Ha! I knew it!" Robin laughed. "The stomach never lies!"

Lucina sat down with the tray in her lap, looking mortified. "I'm sorry! That was very rude of me," she apologized.

"Don't be sorry! That's just you telling yourself you need food." As if on cue, Robin's stomach let out a low moan as well. He fell silent for a second, then burst out laughing again. Lucina tried to maintain a straight face, but couldn't help giving a small smile. "Speaking of being hungry!" Robin exclaimed. "Do you mind if I sit?"

"Oh, not at all!" Lucina replied, still a little flustered, and shifted herself over on the crate so Robin could take a seat next to her.

"Well this looks delicious, doesn't it? Go on, dig in!" he told her, picking up a fork and starting to jab at a mound of potatoes.

Lucina didn't know how to react to Robin's sudden concern over her, and absentmindedly just watched him attack his plate. He eventually caught her, looking a bit puzzled as to why she was staring at him and not devouring her own meal, and motioned with a nod of his head that it was okay to start eating. Lucina blushed deeply again and immediately shifted her attention to her own plate as if nothing had happened. Fork in hand, she piled on a little bit of everything before taking a bite. The warm meal tasted fantastic, much better than any of the cold scraps from the leftovers she would grab once everyone had left the mess tent, and she eagerly took another bite. The two ate quietly for a while until Robin finally broke the silence.

"That was nice, you know," he said, staring off into the distance.

"Hmm?" Lucina swallowed what was in her mouth, and questioningly looked at him. "What was?"

"That was the first time I think I've ever seen you smile. You always seem so serious and stressed out, so it made me happy to see you relaxed for once, that's all. I guess that sounds a little weird when you say it out loud," Robin realized.

"No, that's....," Lucina was at a loss for words. "I guess I don't smile much, do I?"

"Not much," he agreed. "But your smiles are genuine, and that's not a bad thing at all. I wouldn't be smiling all that much if I came from the awful world you described." Robin's tone was immediately much more somber and serious.

"There was nothing to be happy about," Lucina contemplated sadly. "With every passing day there was more misfortune, more suffering..., more death..." She inhaled deeply before finishing, looking down at her almost empty plate and squeezing her eyes shut. "You wake up one day and find that your whole world... fell apart overnight."

Lucina's eyes shot open when she realized that Robin had put a hand on her shoulder. She tried to avoid all forms of physical contact unless absolutely necessary, so the touch of someone else was foreign to her. If she hadn't been talking about her future she would have brushed him off immediately, but the warmth of his hand gave her an unknown comfort.

"Hey, it's okay now," he told her softly. "You're here, and you made it through the worst. Chrom and Sumia are here too, and neither of them are going anywhere on my watch. I couldn't even imagine losing my parents in such a way..."

"But what about you?" Lucina objected, eager to avoid the topic of her father's death. "It must have been hard for you too. At least I have childhood memories of my parents. You... don't have that, much less even memories of who your parents are." She met his stare to find his auburn brown eyes deep in contemplation.

"That's true," Robin admitted. "I don't know what a mother and father's love feels like, so I'm not the best judge of what you felt by any means." He paused, eye catching on the first faint star appearing in the evening sky. "It was scary," he said at last. "Not knowing who I was, where I came from, or what I was meant to be. But ever since the day I woke up and your father found me, I was able to create new memories and dreams. It's okay that I don't remember my old family, whoever they were, because I made a new one. Everyone here is very special to me, and no matter how strange they can be sometimes, I wouldn't trade them for anything, even my old life back."

"I have it easy, because I don't have to forget," Robin continued, looking back at her. "People like us, we have to make new happy memories to replace the old, and find new things to smile about."

"Do you really think so?" she asked in awe, struck both by how much he seemed to understand and how genuine his words seemed.

"One hundred percent positive," Robin replied assuredly, placing dirty plates back on his tray and tucking his utensils underneath them. He slowly hoisted himself up, clutching the tray in one hand.

"Well, I'm going to bring this back to the mess tent," he sighed, gazing off in its direction. "You're important to a lot of people, Lucina, myself included. Please don't make those people worry too much, okay?" He looked back at her with a gentle smile. "I'll leave you to your business then. I apologize if you felt uncomfortable by my intruding." He turned to leave as Lucina hurriedly replied.

"No! Don't be sorry! It... it was nice talking to someone for a change. Thank you for dinner."

"Anytime," Robin looked over his shoulder. "Let me know if you need anything else. Good night!" he spoke, giving a small wave before continuing on his way.

"Good night," Lucina quietly repeated at Robin's receding figure, already disappearing into the darkness of night. She ran her gloved hand through the strands of her cobalt blue hair, and found herself already missing the other hand on her shoulder. What Robin had said about making new memories... Could what he had said be true? Trust was something she had seemingly lost along with her smile, but both seemed to want to return to her tonight. He had said that she was special to him, but how so? Was it just because she was his best friend's daughter, or did he mean something else entirely? And why was it that she had been so embarrassed around him? Robin had left her with more questions than answers, and already her mind was racing to piece together reasonable answers. Lucina felt something warm in her heart, and there was one thing she knew for sure: it wasn't her meal.

So there's their first actual conversation together - nothings happens just yet, but...

What do you guys think? I'd love to hear what people have to say about my writing and such, so what you like about it or what things could be changed/improved a bit to make them better!

***Chapter 2*: Dishonorable Tactics**

In which Lucina loses track of time and Robin gets an unexpected surprise

Chapter 2 – Dishonorable Tactics

Lucina awoke the next morning still feeling somewhat sleepy yet rather refreshed. Letting out a small yawn, she lazily put together an outfit to wear for the day. Fortunately it wasn't that hard to do considering she wore the same thing almost every day. It was washed often and kept neat of course; she didn't want her clothes to resemble those of Gaius's with all the stains and the distinct musk of filth before Cordelia beat him into shape. Apparently sticking to the color blue was in her best interest too if she took her mother's subtle criticisms of her fashion sense to heart.

Fixing her gloves into place, she set out for her father's tent to see if he was awake yet. As she shuffled down the path, Lucina couldn't help but notice the lack of activity around the other tents. There were always at least a few Shepards awake before the sun even broke the night's dark hold with the light of day, but they appeared to be absent today. How odd, she noted to herself, weaving between some storage crates to reach the tent Chrom shared with her mother Sumia. Poking her head through the tent flap just a little in case her parents weren't decent, she called out softly.

"Father! Are you awake yet?"

No reply. Could he still be asleep? It wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility, she supposed. Cynthia had told her numerous times that Chrom was rather stubborn getting out of bed when she would charge in at some ungodly hour and try to get him to tend to her pegasus with her. She complained to Lucina that she and Chrom weren't getting enough "father-daughter time" and that the morning was the only time he was free. Lucina didn't blame her father one bit though, as she assumed that even having a wyvern screech in your ear was a more pleasant wake-up call than Cynthia in the morning.

"Father!" she said again a little louder, stepping into the tent. "Are you here?"

Upon closer examination of the tent's interior, neither her father nor her mother was anywhere to be found. They must have gotten an early start today, Lucina assumed, stepping out of the tent and stretching her limbs a bit. Now where would they have gone? They must be getting ready for breakfast, she thought, and set her next destination for the center of camp.

Getting closer she could hear voices coming from mess tent, and she couldn't help but wonder if the rest of the Shepards had missed Robin not being there last night. Last night. The still unanswered questions fluttered throughout her head like butterflies to flowers. From the moment Robin had left her, Lucina had spent the remainder of the night with questions of trust and memories on her mind. They definitely needed some more attention later today, Lucina sighed.

Walking through the open tent flap, eyes still half-closed, she gave a general "Good morning, everyone," to the group.

The voices stopped entirely and the tent fell dead silent. "More like good afternoon, love," Lucina heard her mother's voice respond after a moment.

"Wha..?" Lucina opened her eyes wider and immediately took into account that all the tables were arranged differently, all lined up in a straight formation. All of the other Shepards were crowding around the center, where she noticed Chrom and Robin standing together over some papers. They must be talking about tactics, but the tactics meeting wasn't until...

"What time is it?" Lucina asked in a semi-panic mode.

Her father turned to face her with a smile on his face. "Almost noon actually," he replied bluntly.

"Almost noon!?" Lucina cried incredulously, mouth hanging agape. "But that means the tactics meeting is almost over! Why didn't you wake me!?" she asked in horror, looking at Chrom like he was insane.

"We thought you would want to sleep in," Chrom said, looking somewhat guilty now. "You don't get much sleep as it is. I mean, you're always awake dawn until dusk training when you have any down time, so I thought it would be a nice change of pace." Noticing the expression of utter dread twisting rapidly across his daughter's face, Chrom also felt it necessary to add, "It was all Robin's idea."

Robin turned immediately at Chrom, looking somewhat betrayed that his friend would attempt such underhanded tactics against him. "Hey! Don't make me look like the bad guy! I just put the idea out there! You're the one who carried through

with it!"

"I didn't say I wanted to let her sleep in! If you hadn't been so insistent I would have woken her up like I originally planned!" Chrom rebuked. Her father was stubborn all right.

Robin pointed his finger up at Chrom, apparently deciding to play his trump card. "Correct me if my memory proves false, but did you not tell me it was an excellent idea when I suggested it?"

Chrom opened his mouth to respond, but didn't have the ability to. "... did say it was an okay idea....," he mumbled angrily in defeat.

"And I thought I was the one with the memory issue," Robin gloated with a devilish grin.

"I watch exactly who I was talking to if I were you, pal," Chrom found a comeback of sorts. "It would be such a shame if a certain tactician I know got demoted to..."

"Boys, please," Sumia sighed, taking it upon herself to end the dispute. "If you two are going to fight like angry little schoolgirls *at least* do it when the entire army isn't around to listen to you."

Sumia's comment seemed to bring the two men back to the reality of their situation, and the sheepish looks they both put on at least brought out a few laughs from some of the other Shepards. Lucina may have even found it funny herself if she wasn't completely mortified of her own lateness. At least their argument turned some of the attention away from her temporarily, and she hurried to take her place among the crowd before they could notice her again.

"Don't worry about it, Lucina," her father reassured. "Robin can fill you in on everything we touched on later. Won't you, Robin, tactician of mine?" Chrom cocked his head towards the man besides him with eyebrows raised.

"Oh, of course, milord!" Robin replied dramatically, addressing Chrom's dislike for formalities. "I'm quaking in my boots as I imagine your wrath if I don't comply!"

Lucina could only give a hushed groan of embarrassment, suddenly becoming aware of the sheer number of other eyes trained on her.

Chrom chuckled then gave Robin a friendly punch on the arm before he addressed the whole group. "So regarding the plan we all agreed on earlier, does anyone have any questions? It's important that you know all this for the fight we have ahead."

Owain's hand shot up from amongst the crowd, and he began to speak. "Now you may know I crave unique battling styles and all..."

"Unique" was one way to put it. Lucina rolled her eyes, finding it hard to believe that he was her cousin. She loved Cynthia as a little sister, but felt that it would make much more sense for her to be Owain's twin.

"But is this plan truly going to be effective against the proposed might of this fiendish conqueror?" Owain continued. His doubts were perfectly understandable though given that he obviously hadn't experienced any of Robin's strange but brilliant plans yet.

"I sure hope so," Robin laughed nervously. "It was the best I could come up with."

"It will work," Chrom added. "It always does."

"Not always....," Robin murmured, suddenly appearing very ashamed.

"You could have never prepared for that," Chrom reassured his friend quietly. "It wasn't your fault." They must be talking about Emmeryn, Lucina thought, thinking back with a grimace. She arrived too late on that day as well.

"But yes," Chrom addressed Owain again. "Trust that the plan will work exactly as Robin described."

"Fascinating..." Owain covered his face with his hand, his fingers half-closing into a fist. If Lucina didn't know him any better she probably would have assumed that he was going to punch himself in the nose. "My sword hand cannot help but twitch in excitement!"

Chrom raised an eyebrow at Owain's theatrics, but after many months of recruiting the Shepards' elite he had gotten somewhat used to the relatively odd behavior that all of them exhibited in one way or another. What a strange little extended family her father had, Lucina thought to herself.

"May I know of our strategy now, Father?" Lucina asked expectantly as the others were slowly filing out at the meeting's conclusion.

Chrom also looked like he was in a hurry to leave as well, only quickly responding, "I'm afraid I can't help you right now, Lucina. Trust me, I'd much prefer it. Robin knows the plan better than I do anyway." He gave a deep sigh of reluctance, scratching the back of his head with one hand. "I promised your sister I would help her groom her pegasus..."

Lucina grinned at the coincidence, asking, "How did Cynthia ever convince you to do that?"

Chrom shrugged, muttering "I must have been delirious when she jumped into my bed at four in the morning yesterday... Gods, what have I gotten myself into?" He sulked out of the tent, leaving Lucina alone with Robin.

She gave her father a wave of goodbye as well as good luck. Chrom was not the sort of person who would enjoy playing a few rounds of hero with her younger sister. Lucina walked over near where Robin remained hunched over his maps and strategy books, organizing himself.

"Robin, if it isn't any trouble, do you mind filling me in on our plan of attack?"

Robin turned around, clutching a few papers that he was still tucking into dog-eared pages of a large, old-looking tome.

"Sure, of course. Here, come over," he gestured with a flick of his hand towards the table. Lucina obeyed and strode next to him, curiously eying some diagrams of the terrain surrounding Walhart's castle. She had come to learn a thing or two about tactics in her future when she had to make decisions without an adviser, but the more complex aspects confounded her. Lucina had to hand it to Robin: judging from the sheer number of warfare elements that she observed from topography to strengths and weaknesses of every soldier, his job must be much more difficult than she originally assumed. How he wasn't stressed all the time was beyond her.

"Before I forget, Maribelle made some tea for everyone before the meeting started, and we saved you a cup for when you got here so you could liven up a little. Sorry if it's cold," Robin apologized, reaching across the table to retrieve a small teacup. It was almost filled to the rim, so Lucina made sure to take him from him carefully.

"Oh, thank you," she expressed with relief. "I could use some tea this morning," she told him as she took a small sip of the lukewarm yet savory beverage. "Speaking of this morning," she lowered the cup from her lips. "Why did you tell my father to not wake me? I thought you would know that I like getting up early," she asked with a subtle hint of annoyance in her voice.

"I guess to shorten my explanation, I just thought you would be happier this morning actually," Robin replied, now slightly unsure of himself given Lucina's tone. "You're always working so hard, so I thought you deserved a break. After last night's what I assumed to be a nice dinner and a good night's sleep, I thought you would be in a better mood today, you know?"

"I suppose I do feel a little more refreshed," the girl admitted. "But I can't stop

working towards what I came here for. That is why every moment of free time I have must be spent training for the battles that loom ahead. I must protect my father."

"I understand why you feel that, and I'm not saying not to protect Chrom by any means, but you don't have to keep working on getting better all the time. I mean, your swordplay is awe-inspiring really; no one could beat you in hand to hand combat when you're determined, so you don't have to worry about that." He set the book he was holding down on the table and became slightly pink in the face. "You're already amazing."

Lucina bit her lip as Robin's words from last night came back to her as well, that she was special to him.

"You're flattering me," Lucina spoke quietly, slightly disappointed in what she was saying.

"I'm serious!" The tactician frowned and dropped both hands on the table like he was an impassioned speaker over a debate. "I know how much responsibility can weigh someone down sometimes. If I didn't take breaks with my job, I would crumble under the stress and go mad, and I don't want that to happen to you."

"No, you couldn't understand what I need to do!" Lucina argued, advancing towards him in an attempt to make a point. Somehow trying to argue with him didn't feel right, especially now that she was beginning to doubt herself, but she couldn't back down from her mission. "You've never seen what happens when my father....," she began, however completely forgot she was still holding a full cup of tea. In the process of walking towards him, she managed to spill some carelessly on the side of Robin's coat. Robin leaped back in surprise of having received a tea bath, and Lucina

pulled the cup back in horror, spilling more of the drink on the floor.

"Ah! Robin! I am so sorry!" she gasped. First she was terribly late for Robin's tactics meeting, and then she had to go and dump a cup full of tea on him. How could he possibly think she was so wonderful after that?

"Oh, no problem!" Robin distractedly assured, holding the wet part of his coat

away from the rest of his clothes so the liquid wouldn't seep into them. "Good thing it wasn't hot actually," he casually joked.

"But that's your favorite coat! That tea will probably stain!" Lucina couldn't

believe how he was treating her stupid accident so nonchalantly. Robin and that coat were inseparable; it was a part of him. "Here, I'll clean it up for you! I promise!" She was already trying to plan out a method to removing the stain, but apparently Robin felt otherwise.

"No, it doesn't matter that much! Not that I'm saying that you won't be able to fix it, because I'm sure you could, but you have enough to worry about. I'll have Cordelia look at it later today. She's an expert with these kinds of things," Robin told her as he dropped the part of the coat he was holding, satisfied that it was dry enough to not affect the rest of his garments.

"Robin, that was completely my fault so I..."

"Really, no big deal. The stain gives it personality," he grinned. "I guess it's about time that this thing got a little dirty actually; I'm honestly surprised it hasn't gotten torn to shreds yet." Judging from the look on Lucina's face, Robin figured that she wasn't about to let the topic go so quickly, so he made an attempt to divert her attention.

"By the way, what were you trying to tell me before... you know...", he gestured at the teacup.

Lucina winced, secretly hoping that after that whole ordeal he would have forgotten that she was going to say something. Everything she was going to say seemed noble initially but now sounded rather mean and selfish. If she could phrase it carefully enough she may be able to not sound like an utterly heartless person.

"The world that will come if my father dies is a terrible place. No one is safe, for not a single soul can escape the fell dragon's wrath," she spoke slowly, wanting to drag her point out as long as possible. "If I do not focus on my training, there's a chance I will fail, and if I do so I'll have only brought the apocalypse upon another timeline. I cannot afford any distractions." Her motives were perfectly reasonable, she thought, but why was explaining them so difficult?

"I cannot afford any distractions," she repeated. "So that means I kindly wanted to ask you... to leave me... alone."

Robin's grin disappeared, and he looked as if she had just slapped him across the face. He stared at her with a saddened realization. "So I was bothering you last night..."

"Yes...", Lucina hesitantly responded, as technically if she had just said that interrupting her training bothered her. But it couldn't be bothering if she had enjoyed it... "But no!" she rejected her previous statement. "Last night was different!"

Robin only seemed to hear her agreement, and looked at her square in the eyes. Lucina had never seen such a somber look on his face before; it was so forlorn to Robin's generally upbeat personality that it didn't appear possible.

"If that's how you feel..., then I'll leave you alone."

Something in the tone of his voice made Lucina avert her eyes immediately and regret everything she had said. She somehow managed to choke out a "Yes, please," despite what she now felt. She couldn't do this. Learning about the battle strategy would have to wait for another time. She had to leave now. Not turning to look back at Robin's face for fear of what she would see, Lucina turned heel and ran to the exit.

"Lucina...", she heard him call out, but she ignored him and didn't stop running until she reached her own personal tent, where she ducked inside immediately to be alone. She wanted to scream at herself. She would never run away from a battle, would

never show cowardice or fear in the face of anyone. It was against everything she had trained for. Why had she run and not faced him? Lucina buried her face in her hands, cursing herself for openly showing such weakness. It wasn't just the self-inflicted disgrace to her honor that she was upset about. It was the unspoken pain that she had seen in Robin's deep brown eyes that was causing her pain as well. How had she not immediately recognized the emotion when it was like looking in a mirror? She had to tell him about why she had to keep training, but to inflict that feeling upon someone

else when she herself was suffering from it... Lucina couldn't think straight anymore with all the conflicting emotions running rampant through her head.

Damn it, Robin! Why are you making me feel like this!?

Let's add a bit of conflict shall we? Does the title make sense now?

Robin and Chrom would definitely argue like dorks a lot btw

As a sidenote to explain how I'm going to characterize Lucina throughout the story so she doesn't seem like a total jerk sometimes - I see her as being very devoted to her duty of saving the past and preventing her future. Lucina doesn't want the horrors of her future to come upon another timeline, so it's hard for her to focus on anything else because she feels that it's her responsibility and if she fails she fails everyone. The problem is that because she was stripped of things a child needs early in life, her perception on her own feelings is damaged in a way, so she doesn't know how to recognize what she feels and how react to certain scenarios. Fortunately that's going to change real soon...

***Chapter 3*: Decisions, Good and Bad**

Chapter 3, now with more action!

This chapter will be one of the few that have some fighting scenes, because I figured that the Shepards are at war and all, and skipping every major battle in between chapters wouldn't exactly have the greatest effect. I hope the fighting is dramatic enough to even be considered fighting... It's only for the first half of the chapter, so don't worry just yet if action isn't your thing!

In which Robin's strategy does work out as planned and Lucina gets seriously injured

Chapter 3 – Decisions, Good and Bad

"Hyah!" Lucina shouted as she cleaved her blade through the armor of an enemy cavalier. This was war, this was her element.

She heard the unmistakable choke of a last breath, and then she swung Falchion to her side over her head, using the momentum of her attacking foe to throw him off his mount easily. The armored horse whinnied nervously at the sudden loss of its master and galloped away in confusion into the forest surrounding the battlefield. Yanking Falchion from the Valmese man's lifeless body, she reassumed a battle-ready stance as another horseman charged her from the right.

Waiting until the horse had broken into a full sprint, she leaped out from its direct path, locking weapons with its rider in the process and throwing him off the saddle to the ground. Nimbly jumping back up onto his feet, the man reclaimed his spear and held its tip pointed at Lucina, using the reach of his weapon as an advantage to push her away. The man attempted a fruitless jab at her leg, but Lucina predicted the attack and slammed her sword's hilt on the wooden handle of the spear, fracturing the other weapon. The cavalier couldn't hope to respond to the counterattack before Lucina plunged Falchion into his chest, and he muttered a garbled yelp before slumping to the ground.

Lucina turned away, shifting her focus once more to her immediate surroundings. Killing still sickened her; the first time she had engaged in a true battle in her timeline she was haunted by the vision of her dying opponent for weeks. It couldn't be avoided though, and experience slowly hardened her mind against the feelings of guilt that had plagued her. She sought to perfect her swordplay techniques to kill quickly, not to annihilate her foes but to make their suffering as brief as possible. Lucina had experienced too much pain in the world to take any enjoyment in inflicting it upon others.

The Shepards were locked in the middle of a battle against Walhart's elite defense calvary during their siege on the Valmese capitol, and Robin's master plan was just about to go into effect. After the Ylissean army had dispensed of the initial wave of cavaliers and knights, the Valmese began to charge with full force, planning to overwhelm the Shepards with sheer numbers and power. Lucina could hear Robin shouting commands over the chaos.

"In position! Steady! Wait until they closer!" he barked, directing their mages to form a widespread line on either side of him, forming a defensive wall in front of the other Shepards. The tactician knew the Valmese would expect the logical reverse choice, the heavy armored units protecting the lesser ones. He wanted Walhart's army to believe that they had the Shepards cornered, and judging from their confident shouts the Valmese had taken the bait. Robin held them for as long as possible, waiting until the enemy was too close to retreat, then gave the order.

"Now!"

Tomes flew open as the mages simultaneously erupted Bolganone spells, scorching the first lines of the approaching calvary with the sizzling lava. The Valmese advance was halted almost instantly, their troops thrown into disarray.

"Wind magic!" Robin called out, initiating the next phase of the attack.

With the command, the next row of mages began casting a storm of heavy winds against the wall of flames that still raged in front of them. The gale pushed the inferno inwards, engulfing the entire opposing army. The plan was brutal but was working brilliantly, effectively crippling almost all of Walhart's best soldiers. Their formations had broken, and now they were wildly charging forward not in attack but as a desperate attempt to escape the deathly fire. Soldiers under normal conditions likely would have surrendered immediately, however the Valmese still were attempting to break through the flames with the few ranks that still remained, likely out of the fear of their commander.

As the Bolganone spells died down slightly in intensity, the enemy army's staggered forces attempted to regroup for another attack. Mages attempted to keep the blaze going for as long as possible with streams of Arcfire; however it was clear that they were exhausting their strength.

"All units! Charge!" Chrom shouted, urging his men to break what remained of the weakened calvary. There was a mighty uproar as the Shepards' battle cries rang out in determination, and as one mass they rushed forward with frightening speed. Lucina caught a glimpse of Owain wildly darting through the battlefield, sticking close to Lissa but clearly enjoying the action, dancing his blade through the air like some frantic performance. Robin at least had kept his promise of the plan's success.

As she pushed her way forwards the front lines, she caught sight of a few of the enemy horsemen assuming a crude ramming formation, one designed to neglect any casualties for the sole purpose of achieving a suicide attack. Calculating their aim, Lucina found that they were focused on the forefront of the Shepards: kill the commander to destroy the army's organization and morale...

"Father!" Lucina cried in his direction, voice drowned out by the clamor in the air. "Watch out!" She desperately shoved her way through the crowd, mind flooding with visions of the worst.

Robin must have noticed, as she heard him call out to her father as well, much better than she at projecting his voice.

"Chrom! To your left!" he warned. "Donnel! Cover Chrom's flank!" he commanded the pot-headed boy, who jumped to Chrom's side immediately for defense.

Donnel? Why Donnel? Lucina couldn't believe what Robin was saying. He honestly expected a simple village boy to defend her father when his death would start a chain of calamities leading to her ruined future? Did he know what was at stake?

"Father! No!"

The calvary charged directly at Chrom, lances outstretched. The Shepards' mages and archers were picking them off steadily, but the attack force was unfazed by their rapidly increasing losses. She just had to get a little closer... Her father drew back his Falchion, and Donnel took up his own lance in an odd fighting stance that he probably fashioned himself. He can't be trusted to fight! Lucina wanted to scream at Robin and his ridiculous decision. How could he?

The Valmese were mere yards away and were closing fast. Donnel crouched down with knees bent, looking ready to spring up with a jump. Lucina burst from the crowd, desperately leaping in front of her father to serve as a human shield.

"Lucina! What are you doing?" her father incredulously shouted at her.

"Gyah! Milady!" Donnel cried out in his thick accent, forced to halt his attack midway in order to not strike her by mistake.

If she had arrived just in time, she realized too late that there were far too many men for her to fight at once alone. Clenching her teeth, she leapt at the cavaliers, attempting to hold her ground. She had no choice. She had to prevail, but there were so many...

Trying to focus on her foes one at a time was impossible, and just as she deflected an attack from one, a metal spear razed her lower torso from behind. A burst of pain engulfed her entire body as the cold metal effortlessly stabbed through her skin and deep into her side. It was over. She collapsed to the beaten ground, putting her hand over her wound in anguish. She immediately felt warm blood seeping from it, staining her tunic with a crimson pool. The agony was unbearable; she couldn't even scream, or cry, or do anything. Lucina felt herself slipping from consciousness, despite her best attempts at keeping her eyes open.

"No!" she vaguely heard Chrom cry out in rage, and she thought she saw his silhouette against the fire stand over her, violently assaulting the enemy horsemen with his sword to defend her crippled form. She couldn't hold on to reality any longer.

"Lucina!" Robin's terrified voice was fading, the uproar of the battle becoming a silent whisper as she drifted into her subconscious.

Lucina awoke with a start, eyes wide with terror. She was lying in a bed, tucked under numerous blankets and inside a tent. She looked around, fearfully anticipating another Valmese soldier to leap out and strike her dead, but no such enemy appeared. It must have been a dream. A very, terrible nightmare. Lucina tried to lift herself upright, but she was thrown back down onto the mattress by a sudden, searing pain in her chest. She winced at the shock and slammed her mouth shut so she wouldn't cry out.

"Whoa! Calm down, Lucina. You're safe here."

It was Robin's voice. She slowly turned her head towards her uninjured side and saw him sitting in chair by her bedside,

examining her intensely and looking very relieved.

"Thank the gods you're okay. I'm going to have to thank Lissa later for doing such a good job with you," he let out a breath he had been holding. "You had me worried sick that you would...," he paused, unwilling to finish his sentence. He was... worried for her?

"What happened?" Lucina moaned, and found it laboring to breathe with her injury.

"You jumped right in front of Chrom and Donnel before they could react, and got stabbed in your side by a Valmese soldier," Robin told her. "What the hell were you thinking? You could have died! You almost died!" He scolded angrily, becoming very distressed.

A little taken aback by Robin's mood, she spoke weakly. "Had to... protect Father," she took small gasps of air with shallow breaths.

"But Donnel was right there. He was ready to attack," Robin reminded her.

"Couldn't trust... to save. Not... good... enough," she struggled with her aching chest.

"Lucina, you almost killed yourself because you didn't think Donnel could protect Chrom?" he asked in disbelief.

She nodded, and then remembered that it was Robin who put Donnel in charge of protecting her father in the first place.

"Why... did you... do that?" she asked in attempted outrage.

"Lucina...," Robin sighed deeply. "Donnel was the closest Shepard to Chrom that I trusted the most before you showed up."

"How... could you... trust... farm-boy... father's life?" she spoke incompletely, unable to express her anger at Robin without causing her bandaged wound to flare up again.

"Donnel was one of the very first Shepards that we recruited. He's been with us since before Gangrel declared war on Ylisse two years ago. Donnel was easily the most determined to prove himself *because* he was farm-boy and most people thought he couldn't fight either. He has a parent that he's trying to protect too you know."

Lucina looked at him expectantly, anger still not quelled.

"He has a mother back in his village. We helped him drive away a gang of bandits that had seized his home and held his friends and mother hostage. He had every right to remain there after the bandits were dispelled," Robin continued. "But Donnel begged Chrom to take him with the Shepards because he realized that he had people who he wanted to protect too, and joining us would help make him stronger so he could carry out that goal. So in a sense, his motivations are just like yours."

"Sure he was inexperienced at first, got a couple more dents in his pot," Robin referenced Donnel's peculiar choice of headwear. "But his will to succeed quickly pushed him to the front lines because he kept trying and honing in on his unique talents. That's why I called Donnel to protect Chrom, because I knew he would do so to the best of his ability."

Lucina was surprised to hear about Donnel in such a positive light. She had no idea that a village boy who wore a cooking pot for a helmet had such intentions. There was still part of her that wanted to keep asking questions, but she was far too tired.

"It was actually Donnel who helped me get you back here," Robin stated, and when he noticed Lucina starting to look around again for someone else in the tent added, "He went back to the battlefield after we arrived."

"Back? Back... to the battlefield? You mean... the battle isn't over!?" Lucina's shock began to override the pains of trying to speak.

"Chrom and I agreed that after the calvary fell, we would have to raid the castle and defeat Walhart before he could muster up any more troops to counter us. They're preparing to fight as we speak."

"Now?!" Lucina shouted. "I have to go immediately!" She quickly swung herself upright in bed, masking the agony of doing so with determination.

"No, Lucina!" Robin growled angrily as he grabbed her shoulder and carefully but firmly pushed her back down into bed.

"Robin! What are you doing!? Let go of me!" Lucina tried to struggle against him, but with her wound found resistance to

be a feeble effort.

"You're in no state to fight, Lucina! Let alone stand! You need rest!" Robin's grip held steady.

She felt helpless, both physically with her injury and due to the fact that she found it impossible to provide a reasonable counter argument. Already exhausted, she eventually ceased her struggling.

"But... but my father... The future....," she whimpered.

Robin's harsh glare softened slightly and he stopped pushing her back, yet kept a hand on her shoulder.

"Lucina, it's going to be all right. Chrom knows the plan, and I trust the Shepards to keep him and each other safe. All of them fight and would die for your father."

Every time Robin said something like that Lucina felt like she should believe him, even though her cautious instincts told her otherwise. Her father put his trust in all the Shepards as well, so maybe that's why they were loyal to him in return, Lucina pondered. Trust enabled the bonds between the Shepards to be strong, but trust was dangerous. If you put your trust the wrong person... Lucina pushed the thought out of her head for the time being.

"If you say so....," she sighed, succumbing to Robin's assurance.

Robin gave her a smiling nod, looking relieved that she wasn't trying to sit up again.

"Robin," she began to ask. "Why did you stay back here? Shouldn't you be in the castle directing our troops?" She just realized that the Ylissean army's master tactician was sitting around watching her in a medical tent and not on the battlefield. "They need you out there! What you doing here when the army needs your tactics?"

"Don't worry: they haven't actually entered the castle yet, and I'll be able to catch up with them before they do. Chrom knows the plan. I'm sure he's competent enough to strategize if I'm gone for a minute."

"But why are you *here*?" she asked again. He could be anywhere else but chose to be here. Lucina had a sneaking suspicion but couldn't possibly think that it was true.

"I was... nervous about you. I wanted to see for myself that you were okay," Robin turned his face so Lucina couldn't see his expression. "Oh! You meant... I'm sorry... I'll leave you alone. Forget I was here." Robin got up of his chair and hurriedly exited without another word, leaving Lucina dumbfounded.

"That's not what I...", she called out, but he was already gone. She *had* said to leave her alone. Lucina felt even worse than when she had a few days before. He was worried for her and she made it seem like she didn't even care. She would have to apologize for that when she saw him next, she thought. Lucina sighed, feeling overwhelmed with the war in general as well as her relations with Robin. Maybe rest was in her best interest for now. She closed her eyes, drifting off to sleep. Those burdens could be put on hold until tomorrow.

Before anyone asks how Lucina recovered from near death (fairly) quickly, I figured that in a world with magic elixirs and healing staves people could heal faster than normal. Also in case it wasn't clear the Shepards haven't actually begun to attack the Valmese castle itself - they're just preparing for the attack outside. Robin wasn't planning on ditching them for such an important battle; he was just checking up on Lucina in camp on the outskirts of the field before meeting up with the rest of the army.

Today marks the last day of winter break before I go back to school, so I won't have as much time to work on this story as I did for the past two weeks. However, I do plan to keep updating with a new chapter at the latest every weekend unless something super important comes up, and hopefully before then.

Severa makes a significant appearance in the next chapter as a little spoiler for everyone! Stay tuned!

***Chapter 4*: The Shared Secret**

In which the war in Valm ends and Lucina gets help from a friend.

Chapter 4 – The Shared Secret

It was over. The Valmese campaign had been exhausting and difficult, but true to their reputation the Shepards had managed to win the day and topple Walhart from his throne of conquest. Most of Valm applauded their victory, finally able to be free from Walhart's oppression. The Shepards were invited to multiple celebrations, most of which were turned down for the sake of time. Lucina actually felt fortunate: if she still didn't feel comfortable with the people around camp in an informal setting, gods know how she would feel at a lavish party.

The Ylissean and Feroxi armies were not without their own devastating losses though: Basilio was cut down by the Conqueror himself on the battlefield and Sayri's brother Yen'fey was killed before his secret motives were revealed. Basilio's death in particular added one to the number of things Lucina felt guilty about. She could have tried harder to convince him not to fight to prevent him from encountering Walhart, but his stubborn pride drove him to battle. Emmeryn and now the West Khan had died in her future as well; it was only another reminder that her fate had not yet been changed.

On a better note, the Shepards were beginning to make their return trip home to Ylisse and Lucina's wound was healing very nicely, likely due to Lissa's devotion to her caretaking. "I can't have my niece all banged up, now can I?" was her reasoning.

Lucina had heard rumors that Robin was voluntarily helping more and more with the other patients so that Lissa had more time to tend to her. Whether or not these rumors were true Lucina could not say for sure, and she was far too embarrassed to ask Lissa whether that was the case. Lucina wanted to apologize for what she had said to Robin about leaving her alone, but even after she was able to move about again he was doing an excellent job at evading her, only allowing a brief greeting before disappearing somewhere. The places where she knew he would be, such as the mess tent around dinner, were always so filled with other people, and she couldn't possibly apologize for something that personal in front of everybody. She much preferred keeping to herself during the evenings, but the urge to speak with him again was beginning to change that opinion. Why did all of her decisions have to be so difficult?

Lucina slipped on her tunic, which Cherche had nimbly patched up for her after it was ripped by the lance, taking care to still be gentle near her side. She stepped out of her tent into commotion, the sounds of crates being piled up and arguments over how to organize things filling the air. The bustle served as an ever present reminder that most of the Shepards were hard at work packing up equipment in preparation for their trek overseas. Lucina figured that it would help take her mind off her mental conflict if she felt useful somewhere. The weapons arsenal seemed relatively inactive from afar, so she figured that she could put herself to work there.

As she made her way down the path, Lucina managed to bump into the person she most wanted to see and the worst possible person he could be with.

"Hello, Lucina," Chrom greeted her as he turned a corner and intercepted her, temporarily breaking away from a conversation with his tactician.

"Good morning," Robin smiled as if nothing was the matter between them, shifting the weight of the books he was holding to one hand so he could wave with the other. "Did you sleep well?"

"Y...yes, thank you," Lucina felt her cheeks growing warm as she gave a weak smile in his direction. Dear gods, she hoped her father wouldn't notice her blushing. If her father suspected that anything personal was occurring between his future daughter and best friend he would probably lose his mind. She would be worrying for her own life rather than his.

Robin turned back to Chrom quickly, dutifully obeying her previous request to stay out of her business, to continue planning for the trip and making sure everything was in order.

If Chrom suspected anything, he did not show any sign of it. Once they had passed, Lucina let out the breath she realized she had been holding. She made a point to hurry to her original destination, not wanting anyone to bump into anyone else she knew who would try and talk with her.

Finally reaching the arsenal, she ducked inside to hide herself from public view. Chrom fortunately was a little dense in reading subtle expressions, but Lucina feared that if other Shepards who were better in that field of expertise saw her blushing, they may become suspicious. If Nah had been with them, she would have caught Lucina instantly; it was

impossible to try to hide something from her. Thankfully the manakete girl was nowhere to be seen, and was probably still sleeping in with her mother.

Lucina weaved in and out of the racks that held most of the Shepards' weapons, everything from swords to axes to even a few spare tomes. The arsenal seemed empty, which was surprising given the amount of activity outside. Lucina opened the lid of an empty crate and began to work, picking up stacks of tomes at a time and placing them neatly into the box. She spontaneously realized that she had never actually held a tome before, and curiosity begged her to reach back into the crate and take one back out to examine. Tomes just appeared to be old books, worn at the edges with slightly torn pages here and there, but just from holding one Lucina could practically feel the energy that they radiated. She gently opened the brown leather cover and slowly flipped through some of the pages. How tomes actually worked with all of their cryptic symbols and ancient writings she didn't fully understand, but their operation brought to mind a different question that she hadn't considered before: could only certain types of people do magic or could anyone use it with enough instruction and practice? The vision of Vaike holding a book instead of an axe in the middle of battle and trying to read it to cast a spell materialized in her head, and she smiled as she closed the cover of the tome. It definitely took special types of people to perform magic, she concluded as she placed the book back in the crate. Robin was one of those people.

Interrupting her thoughts, Lucina heard a faint mumble from the other side of the tent. It sounded like someone else was talking to themselves, she assumed as she walked over to check the noise. Locating the source of the grumbling, she found Severa struggling to carry a heavy-looking crate.

"Severa? What are doing?" Lucina questioned, poking her head out from behind a row of lances.

"Gah!" Severa yelped in surprise, instantly dropping the crate, which hit the ground with a dull thud and kicked up a cloud of dust. "Lucina!" she shouted angrily once she realized who had interrupted her work. "What the heck are you doing sneaking up on me like that? Now you just made me drop this box full of weapons and someone is probably going to blame me for putting a dent in their stupid sword or something!" she scolded.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Lucina looked at her apologetically. "Here, I can get it."

She reached down to grab the crate before the other girl shooed her hands away.

"I can do it myself, thank you very much!" Severa looked peeved, trying to regain her composure.

"All of it?" Lucina asked. "Someone told you to do all of this by yourself?" She gestured towards the vast racks of various weapons in disbelief.

"Well...", Severa looked to the side. "Yarne and Brady were here too, but I told those two saps to go take a hike." Her long pigtails swished in the air as she turned to look at Lucina, who had her own eyebrow raised at Severa's attitude. Severa glared at her, then grunted in annoyance and took hold of the crate with both hands. Lucina just stood over the other girl as she tried to lift the box on her own again with little success.

After several failed attempts, Severa stopped and scowled.

"Geez, it wouldn't hurt to help someone in need every once and while, would it?"

Lucina sighed. Severa hadn't changed a bit. "Do you need some help, Severa?" she asked again exaggeratedly.

"Well, fine. If you're so insistent I guess I could humor you." Severa made it seem as if she didn't need assistance at all.

Lucina smiled at her friend's snarky temper as she bent down to take hold of one side of the crate while Severa took the other. Working together, they were able to package and move most of the inventory much quicker than if one person had done it alone. They worked in silence for the most part, but finally Severa admitted out loud.

"Thanks for helping, I guess. I probably couldn't have done it by myself now that

I think about it. Sorry for being mean."

"You don't have to do everything by yourself, Severa," Lucina assured. "We're all here for you." She was starting to sound a lot like someone she knew. Maybe it would help to talk about her situation, albeit vaguely, and get someone else's opinion if she couldn't come up with one of her own. She wouldn't dare tell her father, but she could trust Severa, couldn't she?" Severa...", Lucina slowly began to ask, delicately phrasing her question in her head. "You know a lot about... relationships, right?"

Severa whipped around, staring at her blankly as she confirmed in her mind that the words did indeed come from

Lucina's mouth, and then she went wide-eyed. "No. Way. Who is it?" she asked at once, looking immediately intrigued.

"What? I didn't even say anything yet...," Lucina took a step back.

"You know who I mean! Your boyfriend!" Severa responded, then her face suddenly became very angry again as she came to another realization.

"Oh, come on!" the girl shouted at the sky, pouting all the while.

"Severa, what are you...,"

Severa pointed right at her, as if she was accusing her for some terrible crime. "Why do you always have to be so perfect?! You're a princess, and you live in a gigantic castle, and you're really pretty, and you have great hair, and now you probably have a super cute boyfriend! Why can't I have *any* of that?!"

"I don't have a boyfriend!" Lucina stammered in response to Severa's horde of accusations of being perfect. "And I'm not perfect either!"

"Humph," Severa grunted, looking more depressed than angry now.

"I'm sorry if I offended you...," Lucina cautiously apologized for reasons still unknown to her.

"No... That was me being selfish," Severa finally responded after taking a moment to recompose herself. "I didn't mean to yell..." Lucina forgot sometimes that Severa suffered from an inferiority complex by living in the shadow of her mother. She was starting to feel guilty even though she hadn't said anything before Severa spoke again, this time with much more confidence.

"But enough of about me! Tell me about your boyfriend!" she demanded eagerly.

"I told you, I don't have a boyfriend!"

"Trust me, Lucina. I know the look of a hopeless lover when I see one," she smirked at her for a second, then frowned slightly. "All too well I might add," she muttered. "My mother."

"I... I am not a hopeless lover!" Lucina was flustered by Severa's quick assumptions.

"Of course you are!" Severa said definitively. "Trust me. I know one when I see one, but I never thought *YOU* would be one," the other girl repeated, then leapt forward, getting right up close to Lucina with her hand on her chin. "Now tell me everything! Every mushy detail!" she begged.

"No! Nothing's happened! I just wanted some advice, that's all."

"Ooo! A secret romance!" Severa looked even more into the conversation than before. "This is so great, especially coming from you, Lucina! Just imagine, what would Chrom think?" she joked.

Lucina immediately went pale at the mention of her father, and was quick to reply, "No! Don't say anything to him! He mustn't get any false ideas!"

"Are you kidding?! I would never tell him! Not in a million years!" Severa looked shocked at the very aspect of revealing any information. "Secret romances are *ALWAYS* the best kind, and you can't just go around messing them up by telling anybody. As long as they're not one sided. Your mystery man likes you too then I hope?"

"I think so..., but I don't know what to think of it," Lucina looked away, embarrassed to even be talking about it. At least Severa didn't know who she was referring to. "And stop calling it a 'secret romance!' You're making me sound like some theater actor..., or Cynthia playing hero."

"The name isn't important, but that's what it is," Severa shrugged. "But that's good! That's real good! As long as you don't have your heart set on someone who will never love you ever and you're madly obsessing over him," her eyes narrowed. "But what you need? I'm an expert."

Why was she even talking about this? "I guess my first question would be, how do I know if he actually likes me or not? He hasn't said anything..."

Severa scratched her chin in contemplation. "Hmm, he hasn't told you anything explicit yet?"

Lucina shook her head.

"Then he's probably one of those shy types. They aren't that good at putting those kinds of feelings into words at first," Severa reasoned.

"Should I ask him?" Lucina questioned and was immediately shot down.

"No! Don't ask! Are you crazy? That will make him feel super awkward! You've got to wait it out for a little longer, but don't get me wrong. Sometimes the shy ones are the most direct when the time comes."

"But what if 'that time' never comes? What if I'm stuck not knowing forever?"

"Oh, it will come," Severa replied. "It always does in one way or another."

Lucina felt a little more reassured, but still sighed. "But what if I shouldn't really be with the person? What if it would never work out?"

Severa's tone grew more serious as she spoke. "You can't control who you really like, Lucina. Love's weird that way. I can't make a decision for you, but what I do know is that you can't suppress it forever. You'll go so crazy trying to not let anyone know that you'll forget why you even like the person in the first place."

"But I can't like anyone!" Lucina cried out feverishly. "I can't! My position doesn't allow it! We can't meddle with the past more than absolutely necessary!"

"Lucina!" Severa spoke sternly. "Don't worry about all of that!" she commanded.

"We're already here, so you have to embrace the fact that just by being in the past we're inevitably going to change the future in one way or another. We can never go back to the exact same future now. It's impossible."

"But...", Lucina began, before Severa cut her off.

"No buts or ifs, you! You said you wanted advice, so here's the best I can give you." She paused briefly for effect, noticing Lucina looking at her expectantly. "Don't lose your chance."

"...That's it?" Lucina questioned, expecting more.

"That's it," Severa confirmed. "I know you Lucina. I know that you have trouble managing what you say and what you really believe. Don't mess this up just because you say you can't," she commanded. "You're going to feel guilty forever if you miss your chance. Do what you feel." Severa was already making her way to the exit, leaving Lucina to consider what she had said. The girl paused as she pushed away the tent flap, looking back at Lucina with a grin. "By the way," she added. "When you decide to tell everyone, I'd better be the first to know!"

"How do you know I'll...", Lucina began to ask, but Severa was already gone.

Don't lose my chance, she repeated over in her mind. Maybe Severa was right. Is that really what she felt? Did she like Robin in that way? What if Robin actually didn't like her at all, if she was seeing things wrong and everything he was doing was as a friend and nothing more? Lucina did decide to take part of Severa's advice for now: she would have to wait a little longer before she could decide. Nothing was ever easy, but maybe just this once the answer to her question would fall into her lap soon enough.

Next chapter, and before the weekend too! Maybe I'll be able to get another one up by then!

I particularly enjoyed writing the speech for Severa here – she has a great personality to create dialogue with. From their supports, I get the feeling that Lucina and Severa are really good friends despite how perfect Severa thinks Lucina is. It seems like Severa looks up to Lucina like a little sister would almost.

Robin also can do magic, both literally and metaphorically apparently.

If there was one literary term to describe what this chapter does for the story, what would it be?

Chapter 5: Epiphany

Sweet, two chapters before the weekend is over! If you couldn't figure out what the word was that described last chapter, it was foreshadowing - all foreshadowing for this chapter! Sorry that Robin didn't get much screentime at all with two lines total of dialogue consisting of six words combined, but his appearance here should make up for that! Big things happen in this one, so mentally prepare yourself!

In which Lucina recalls her past as a young child and Robin sees into her mind

Chapter 5 - Epiphany

It was dinnertime.

Lucina could see shadows dancing in the quivering candlelight across the walls of the mess tent. As the setting sun slowly allowed tendrils of darkness to creep over the land, the glow from the tent in contrast appeared to strengthen with every passing minute. The heart of camp pulsed rhythmically with the flickering flames and embraced its surroundings with the light that penetrated the canvas. People were inside, probably having an enjoyable evening as they ate and talked amongst one another. They had all the reason to: there was no constant threat of an impending attack, and the return trip overseas to Ylisse was scheduled in three days.

Lucina had never felt the urge to join the others for dinner until she had begun to come to terms with her feelings after her conversation with Severa a few days ago. Now she could sense the light beckoning to her, trying calling her back from the solitude of the night, but she was too far away and its pull was still too weak. She was keeping watch from atop a small hill that the camp was nestled under, a safe vantage point to think without being seen.

Even without any imminent danger present, Lucina subconsciously found her gaze wandering to her father's tent. It was close to the center of camp, but other than that there was nothing special about it and was no bigger than any of the others in comparison. Chrom even refused to have any assigned, around-the-clock bodyguards, if Frederick didn't count of course, because he disliked the prospect of appearing superior to the rest of the army. When Lucina had asked him why, her father had said that he wanted every one of the Shepards to feel equal and comfortable around him so they would treat him as a friend rather than commander.

It was certainly an amicable action, but Lucina hoped he knew that he was still putting himself at risk. There had never been any problems before; however, Lucina's anxiousness clung to one crucial piece of information that she had yet to tell anyone. Her father had died in her future when she was only eight, and her last memory of him was when he had hugged her goodbye and when he had told her that if the Shepards prevailed in the coming battle, the conflict would finally be over and he could come home. A few days later, Lucina had been pretending to be the leader of her very own junior Shepards with a younger Cynthia and Owain when she had heard of the incident. The bright azure sky had turned progressively darker on that day with ominous clouds that would have signaled an approaching storm; her child-self paid them no mind, for she was having far too much fun fencing with wooden swords.

All of a sudden a group of nervous maids rushed out into the courtyard and seized each of them by the arms, pulling them inside the castle. She and her friends were herded into the main hall, where Lucina saw her mother with her back turned along with some of the other Shepards. She didn't understand why they were here, but nevertheless watched all of her heroes with silent wonder. Lucina wriggled free from the grip of the maid who had been holding her, and she ran over to Sumia and tugged on her skirt to get to attention.

"Mom, you're back!" she exclaimed excitedly, but when her mother turned around her smile slipped away. Sumia did not look anywhere near as happy, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. She was holding the sheathed Falchion, Chrom's sword, in her arms.

"What's wrong, Mommy?" young Lucina asked in concern as she looked around. "Where's Daddy?"

"D...Daddy... isn't here right now, love," Sumia put on a forced smile as she reached down to stroke her hair.

"Where is he? Is he coming back?"

"...No... Your father is... gone," Sumia's voice was quivering as she spoke.

The news didn't register with her at first. She looked from side to side, each time more frantic than the next. Of all the pairs of eyes upon her, not one of them was her father's. Lucina started breathing hard as the reality of what her mother had said began to sink in. The people watching her who had once been her role models suddenly became very threatening to her. She panicked and ran, ran as fast as her little legs could take her. She thought she heard her mother

call out to her, but she couldn't remember. Lucina didn't stop until she got to her room and slammed the door shut. Her room seemed impossibly large, and for the first time in her life she realized how small she really was. Lucina threw herself into her bed, wrapped the covers all around her, and cried. Her father was gone. Her father was gone forever and there was nothing she could do about it.

She stayed there under the warmth of the blankets for what seemed like an eternity to a child. No one came to bother her until she heard the faint voices of a few maids talking amongst each other as they walked past her door. Slipping out of the bed, Lucina put her ear up to the door and strained to hear what they were saying. They were already almost gone, but Lucina did hear one thing that horrified her: that her father was not cut down by an enemy, and instead was betrayed by a friend. One of the Shepards, whom her father trusted so much, had killed him.

The awful memory had never left her to this day; no matter how much she attempted to suppress it, the memory still raised its ugly head from time to time just to remind her that no one could be trusted. Lucina tried to tell herself numerous times that things could be different, but her judgment refused to allow it. Someone down there is her father's killer, she told herself as she looked again at the mess tent. She just couldn't imagine who.

Both the silence of the night as well as the silence of her thoughts was disturbed by something approaching her from behind. Her hand found Falchion's hilt, but as she turned her shoulder she was greeted by a familiar voice.

"Hello Lucina."

She squinted in the low light, and sure enough Robin was laboring his way up to the top of the hill with his hands behind his back.

"Robin! I didn't expect you to be here!" she exclaimed, thankful that it wasn't somebody else.

Robin was quick to give a disclaimer. "Listen, I've been trying to do what you said..., leaving you alone and all, and I'm sorry if it bothers you that I'm here, but I've been thinking, and there's something that I need to tell you."

"Wait, hold that thought!" Lucina blurted out, remembering what she had been trying to do for over a week. "About that, I have something that I've wanted to tell you too."

Robin stopped in his tracks, eying her nervously as if he was afraid of what he was about to hear.

"I wanted to say that I'm sorry, about what I said. I've been trying to get you alone for days to let you know, but you were always with someone else so I wasn't able to. I didn't see how helpful and kind you were to me at first and I only responded by being selfish. I want you to know that I truly appreciate everything you've done for me, and I'm sorry for telling you to go away." With every word she spoke it felt as if a huge burden was slowly being lifted from her shoulders.

Robin's tense expression seemed to be lifted as well, and he let out a massive sigh as his mouth curved upwards into a smile. He was quiet for a moment before responding. "I can't begin to describe how much relief those words just brought me," he said at last. "It will make this so much less awkward... Here, I brought these for you." Robin removed his hands from behind him to reveal a small bouquet of flowers that he held out to her. "I found these growing by the side of the road, and I thought that they might cheer you up."

"F...for me?" Lucina stuttered as she reached out to gingerly take the bouquet from him. She held the flowers closer to her face so that she could see them clearer, slowly rolling the stems in between her fingers to make the petals rotate in small circles. The flowers were daisies, Lucina presumed, with symmetrical white petals and a bright yellow center. For a moment she was entranced by their purity as they span in her fingers before she was able to break away.

"Robin, these flowers are so beautiful... Nothing this lovely grew in my time," she commented as she looked up at him. His face appeared troubled, as if he had something else on his mind other than the flowers. "What are we celebrating? Is it a special occasion today?" Lucina asked.

"No, nothing like that," Robin replied distractedly as he turned to look down on camp. "... just thought that they would make you happy, that's all."

"Well they make me very happy. Thank you," Lucina smiled in reassurance.

"That's good," Robin sighed in relief again.

Lucina looked at him in concern: he was behaving rather oddly. "Robin..., is everything okay? You don't seem yourself."

Robin was quiet, and he watched the shadows flicker from camp for a minute before responding. "Lucina, I've been thinking. Over these past few days, I've been thinking, searching for ways that I can help you." He turned back to her, and

even in the low light Lucina could clearly see his eyes burning with a sudden intensity.

"...Help me?"

"Ever since I was with you in that medical tent and you told me why you jumped in front of your father, I haven't been able to stop trying to understand what you feel. You've gone through so much and put all these burdens upon yourself, and I knew that I could never help you through them if I didn't understand why you do the things you do. I was so lost at first; I was clawing to find something that just wasn't there in my knowledge. But then it hit me all at once," Robin spoke boldly and slowly took a few steps towards her. "I remembered when I had told you so many nights ago how I felt when Chrom first found me, and I think that it makes sense to me now." His eyes bore into her, seeing through them as if they were made of glass and looking deep into her soul. "You distrust every ally... because you feel alone."

"Robin..."

"How have you done it?" he asked desperately as his voice became more rapid. "You've taken a mission upon yourself that's larger than life, and to carry it out you had to leave that life that you knew and come here. You feel like a stranger in a world that isn't yours. Everything is different from what you knew."

Lucina couldn't believe what Robin was saying, not because it didn't make sense but because it was completely true. He was putting into words for her the feelings that she had experienced but never had been able to pin down ever since she came to the past. She didn't want to have to face the reality of them, but somehow knew it had to be done. Her lip started to quiver, and for the first time she wasn't able to stop it.

Don't cry, Lucina.

"You don't want anyone close to you because you don't want to lose them like how you lost everything in your future: your home, your parents, your happy memories..."

Don't cry.

"And now that you have all of those things back, you don't know what to do. The very idea of losing your life all over again is stopping you from living it." Robin continued to advance on her, face mixed with pity and sadness. "All the time... you're terrified..."

Don't...

Robin's final conviction wrung a single tear from her eye, the one that bore the Brand of the Exalt, and it slowly rolled down her warm cheek. After the first came another, then so many that her vision became blurred. "It's...so hard...", she choked, trying to hide her face but failing miserably. "...I'm scared...", she whispered before breaking out into sobs.

Lucina immediately felt Robin seize her and pull her into a tight embrace. She didn't care about interfering with the past at the moment. She needed human comfort right now, which she found crying in Robin's arms. Robin said nothing, but she didn't need him to. All she needed was for him to be here and to not let go of her.

"You don't have to be alone anymore, Lucina," he whispered softly. "Just know in your heart that I'm here for you, no matter what. And I swear to you that I will do everything in my power to make your world a better place, so I hope you don't mind me doing this."

He took hold of both her arms and separated her from him, holding her away. Lucina opened her teary eyes and for a brief second met his before Robin leaned down and pressed his lips gently against hers. Lucina's eyes went wide, then she squeezed them shut again as she could think of no way to respond but to kiss him back. Robin filled her with a hope that she never knew even had existed, one that she felt would give her the strength to break free from the fear that had controlled her for so long. She needed him now; it was something that she had felt deep down in her heart and now knew with certainty to be true.

As soon as Robin pulled away, she buried her face in his chest again. "Robin..., thank you... For everything...", her voice was muffled by Robin's coat, which still had that tea stain. "You were the only person who ever cared to help me, and I didn't see that until now." Lucina pulled her face up to look straight at him with a smile wider than she would have ever thought possible. "I'm... I'm just so happy!" she exclaimed.

"You don't know how happy I am to find out that you feel the same way!" Robin grinned as he reached down with one hand to brush the tears from Lucina's cheeks. "If you ever feel scared or lonely again, know I'll be there with you every step of the way," he soothed. "So no more tears, okay? You have such a beautiful smile."

Lucina couldn't find any more words to say how she felt, so the least she could do was to heed his request and keep

smiling.

"That's what I like to see!" Robin laughed and took hold of her hands, holding them close to him as he interlaced his fingers with hers. Lucina squeezed his hand back, and looked with him away from camp. Away from the war and towards the horizon, where her future felt more like a thing of the past than it ever had been.

Yay, happy chapter! It was meant to be based loosely off their S-support (without them getting married at the end of course) because I thought Robin giving Lucina flowers was cute. I felt like the story needed to go somewhere important without turning into complete fluff, thus this chapter was born. The whole scene was designed to be a heat-of-the-moment type thing where Robin decides to man up and Lucina is already on an emotional precipice from her backstory all at once in case you were thinking that it was a little sudden. On a slightly different note you got some adorable little kid Lucina in there, which is always good. Also, just saying "I love you" as the climax of the big scene has become quite cliché by this point I think, so that's why neither one of them actually says it – they say it in a different way.

But does this mean that just because they kissed that everyone is going to be in a state of perpetual bliss, the emotional drama will end, Robin and Lucina can be together forever, and the story is almost over? No, no, no, and no - it's only just getting started, so don't you worry (unless that's actually what you were hoping for so in that case I'm sorry)! They haven't even gone to Plegia yet heh heh... Next chapter will likely be another happy one before we hit more drama!

Chapter 6: Perfect Imperfections

Disclaimer: Reading the following chapter is fluffier than eating cotton candy on a bed of warm blankets, so be warned. As promised, here's the other happy chapter! This one is twice the length of the others without these beginning/end notes, so you get a lot to read for today!

In which the Shepards get a day off and Robin takes Lucina out on a date

Chapter 6 – Perfect Imperfections

"Father? Where is everybody?" Lucina asked, wiping a thin film of sweat from her forehead. She had decided to take a quick break from her training regimen only to find the entire camp almost devoid of activity. It seemed like a ghost town compared to the nonstop commotion of the past few days. "We leave for Ylisse tomorrow and no one seems to be around."

Chrom looked up from the post-war documents he was reading in his tent and replied, "Probably in the city nearby. I gave the Shepards a day off today. They all earned it, that's for sure. Didn't you hear when I told everyone?"

"I was at the training grounds this morning. I must have missed it..."

Her father tossed his papers haphazardly on the desk and leaned back in his chair. "Honestly, Lucina... You don't have to work every minute of your life," he sighed. "Go out and enjoy yourself for once! Take that as an order from your father!" Chrom pointed outside the tent dramatically as a gesture for her to leave.

Lucina gave a small laugh. "But Father, I don't have anything else to do."

"Gods, I have one daughter who I have to tell to *stop* getting excited over something and now I have one who I have to tell the opposite. You don't need to start training again as soon as we win a war, Lucina," Chrom grinned. "Now go. Have a nice time somewhere!"

"Okay, Father," Lucina smiled, turning away from her father to leave. Before she even began to walk away, Chrom poked his head out the tent flap.

"I'm serious, Lucina," he added. "I'm going to check up on the training grounds in a little while, and I'd better not find you there."

"I'll just find another place to practice," Lucina joked.

Chrom just rolled his eyes and retreated back inside the tent, leaving Lucina to wonder what to do for the rest of the day. She wasn't used to having a few hours to herself, and she wasn't sure about where to start until she bumped into someone while turning a corner through the camp.

"There you are! I've been looking all over for you!" Robin's cheery voice found her ear.

"You have?" She couldn't help but blush as she saw Robin running over to her. Just the thought that he was looking for her made Lucina innately happy. Ever since they had kissed a night ago every little gesture Robin gave her from a smile to a wave immediately put her into a better mood.

"Of course I have! Since we have the day off, I was going to ask you if you wanted to go somewhere with me," Robin told her.

"I would love to," Lucina smiled as she folded her hands behind her back. She couldn't believe that her first thought hadn't been to find Robin as well. "But where should we go?"

"I figured we could do some shopping; there's this very particular text I've been searching for that one of the booksellers in town may have if I'm lucky, and I got word from a reliable source that you particularly enjoy clothes shopping."

"Reliable source?" Lucina raised an eyebrow before realizing the answer was obvious. "My mother."

"The one and only," Robin confirmed. "You might want to change out of your armor before we leave though," he told her, and then hurriedly added, "Not that what you're wearing doesn't look good on you or anything! I just don't want to attract too much celebratory attention from all the Valmese, that's all. I know my coat would probably give me away as soon as I stepped foot within the town borders."

"Don't worry, I understand," Lucina laughed. It was sweet of him to worry about offending her even when he didn't mean to.

"Perfect," he sighed as if he had just avoided a terrible disaster. "I have to change as well. Meet me by my tent when you're ready, okay?"

Lucina gave a small nod and excitedly rushed off to her own tent to change. She immediately went to work unstrapping her shoulder-plates and removing her gloves before slipping out of her cape, all of which she tossed into a disorganized heap onto her bed. Her fingers hesitated when she reached for the sheath strapped to her hip. She would have to leave Falchion behind if she didn't want to be recognized instantaneously by the townspeople, but Chrom's last memento rarely left her sight. Lucina would never admit it to him, but besides the blade being her weapon of choice it held equal importance as a comfort object of sorts. As long as she had it near her it felt as if her father was always at her side, even when he wasn't around. But she had Robin with her, didn't she? Methodically she unbuckled and untied the sheath, taking care to wrap it up in a small bundle before placing it into the small chest that held her belongings. She felt vulnerable, exposed even, without her armor on. As long as Robin stayed close though she felt confident that she could bear being without it for a little while.

Despite shopping for clothes being one of her guilty pleasures, Lucina had very little to choose from. A full wardrobe would only be more for the convoy to carry, so she kept her clothes choices to a bare minimum with functionality as the main objective. A little disappointed now that she didn't have anything special to change into, Lucina decided to keep what remained of her outfit intact as she reached up to groom her hair. As she attempted to make her hair look somewhat presentable, her hands found her headband. It might give her away, but it did manage to hold some of her hair back, so it was one thing she decided to keep.

This is ridiculous, she scolded herself. You're just going out shopping and you're pampering yourself up like a princess.

She realized her analogy didn't quite work given that she technically *was* a princess, but she dismissed the thought. Lucina never felt like a princess anyway, so what was the point of dwelling on it too much? Deciding that she was relatively ready to go even though her hair was probably still a mess, she exited her tent to find Robin's.

Robin was already outside waiting for her when she arrived. Like he had implied, he had removed his coat in favor of the sleeveless undershirt he wore underneath. She hadn't been able to tell underneath the coat, but with it off she was surprised with how well he was physically built. The thought skipped her mind initially, but Lucina realized that fighting in the war would inevitably help one's fitness.

Stop it! That's weird to think about! Lucina had never been distracted by someone's appearance before, but for the first time she realized that Robin was rather attractive. *Stop...* She futilely attempted to banish the thought but couldn't help it.

"Sorry that I couldn't find anything else to change into....," Lucina apologized as she approached him.

"Hey, I don't look all too different either," Robin grinned. "You look cute though."

Lucina felt her cheeks turning warm at his comment. He had never called her that before. "You don't look all too bad yourself."

Robin laughed and motioned with his hand. "Come on, town isn't that far away. Maybe half hours walk at most."

"Right," Lucina acknowledged and hurried next to him so they could walk side by side. As soon as they were out of view of the camp, Lucina tentatively put her left hand out and tucked it underneath Robin's right. He was the one who was blushing now as he closed his hand around hers. The walk to town didn't seem long at all; it went by much too fast.

It was hard for anyone not to fall into a good mood in town. Free to live without fear, the townspeople spread a contagious elation to all they greeted. Shops belonging to traveling merchants had opened up all along the town square and had brought a torrent of activity. Children played on street corners and watched performers in the square. Taking a glimpse at some of the dancers, Lucina couldn't help but wonder whether Olivia and Inigo were putting on an act of their own anywhere in town. Despite their bashfulness they both became remarkably confident when they danced for an audience; it was as if dancing lifted weights off their shoulders for a short time and transformed them into different people. Ordinarily the crowd would have put Lucina on edge, but apparently the vibrant atmosphere was rubbing off on her as well.

"Is there anything you want to do first?" Robin had to raise his voice over the clamor to ask. He shuffled a little bit closer to Lucina so he wouldn't lose her amongst all the other people.

There were so many shops selling everything from pet birds to baked goods that Lucina had no idea of where to begin. The first thing that came to her mind was what Robin had told her earlier that he was looking for.

"Why don't we search for that text you wanted?" she suggested. "It looks like there's a store that sells books on the other side of the street." Lucina tried pointing out the building she was referring to, but could barely stick her arm out in front of her without bumping into someone.

"That sounds like a good idea. We'll be able to get out of this crowd for a bit too."

With a bit of tactical maneuvering they were able to reach the store quite quickly for the number of people that blocked their path. Apparently Robin was as good at strategizing how to weave through a crowd as he was with mobilizing troops. A pleasant chime rang out as Robin opened the door, and once inside Lucina immediately caught the distinct smell of old books. The bookstore was small so therefore relatively empty, and had that ancient look to it that if one were to disturb anything the very action would kick up a massive cloud of dust. Lucina could see Robin's eyes lighting up; this was probably the kind of place he could spend hours in, flipping through all the books he could get his hands on.

"Do you need anything?" spoke a quiet but sweet voice from the silence.

Lucina jumped in surprise, instinctively reaching for Falchion's hilt but had to remind herself wasn't there. A petite old woman that Lucina hadn't noticed when she walked in seemed to materialize behind the counter to their right. She was wearing simple clothing and had thin-rimmed spectacles that magnified her pale eyes. Robin seemed just as startled as she was, but quickly recollected himself.

"Yes, actually. I'm looking for a very particular strategy book."

"Strategy? As in war?" the woman asked contemplatively.

"Would you have anything like that?" Robin inquired.

"I should have a few towards the back wall. They're very old though," she gestured with a wrinkly hand.

"Thank you," Robin replied graciously and began to wander in the general direction of where the woman was pointing.

"Take all the time you need." She gave a small sigh before shifting her attention towards Lucina. "And what about you? Looking for anything specific?"

"No thank you. I'm with him," Lucina suddenly felt a little anxious at being put on the spot.

"Suit yourself. If you need anything, just ask," the woman responded as she adjusted her glasses, holding up a book she was reading for herself.

Eager to escape the shopkeeper's line of sight, Lucina ducked behind a shelf and absentmindedly scanned through titles of books she saw as she walked by. Pausing out of curiosity in front of a fiction section, Lucina pulled what appeared to be a romance novel from the shelf. *This looks like the kind of thing my mother would read*, Lucina assumed as she flipped to an unspecific page and read a few paragraphs. The novel was rather poorly-written and one of the sappiest things Lucina had ever laid eyes on, but even so she found herself flipping through page after page. In the story, a valiant prince with his princess by his side was journeying all over the land on horseback. There was one scene Lucina read in which the two visited a grand city and seemed to be having a wonderful time in each other's company. Lucina smiled at the coincidence. *If the book had any truth at all, maybe she was more like a princess than she thought.*

"I didn't know you enjoyed romantic novels."

Lucina slammed the book shut and turned around to find Robin standing right over her shoulder. "No, I don't read... How long have you been standing there?" She couldn't believe she had let herself get caught reading it.

"Only for a minute," Robin admitted, holding up a book that could have easily been a hundred years old. "I found the book I wanted, so I came to find you. You seemed so engrossed in that book though that I didn't want to interrupt."

"That's embarrassing....," Lucina sighed, returning the book back into its place among the others.

"Don't be embarrassed about it! Everyone has things that they like to read some time or another," he reassured, reaching to pull the book from the shelf. "Are you sure you don't want to get this?"

"No, I'm positive!" she hurriedly responded, wanting to separate herself from the book as much as possible.

"If you say so..." Robin put the book back again, still not looking entirely sure with Lucina's decision. "I'll just buy this real quick and then we can go somewhere else. Do you want to wait outside to search for another store to go to?"

"I suppose." Lucina exited the store while Robin negotiated a price with the old shopkeeper. She had to stand on the tips of her toes to see over the crowd, and amid the surge of people her eye caught a stand that looked like it was selling dresses. The second Robin stepped out of the store, Lucina seized him by the arm like an excited child. "Robin, we have to go there!"

He barely had time to ask "Go where?" before Lucina started dragging him down the street, pushing people out of her way to reach the stand. "Robin! Look at this!" she squealed in happiness as soon as they arrived. Lucina took a bright green dress with purple stripes running down it off a hanger and held it out to him. "Isn't this just adorable? What do you think?"

Robin took one look at the dress and winced. "Um..., it's very... colorful, and a little hard to look at..."

The smile ran away from Lucina's face as she judged Robin's reaction. "It isn't that good, isn't it?" she realized disappointedly. "Oh, you hate it! I guess I don't have a good fashion sense after all..."

"Your fashion sense is... unique to say the least," Robin admitted, making an attempt to carefully phrase his words as to not hurt her feelings. "But maybe we can find another dress that's more *you*."

"Ok...", Lucina reluctantly hung the neon dress back on its hanger.

"I guess I can't say that I'm a professional regarding women's fashion either," Robin murmured as he began to flip through a group of hanging dresses. He tentatively held up a long maroon dress. "Would this one work?"

"I don't think red would go along well with my hair," Lucina replied before returning to her own search.

"Your sense of style must be better than mine if that makes you feel any better," Robin chuckled, putting the dress back.

"Tone down the vibrant factor," Lucina spoke under her breath to remind herself to put back anything she picked out that was too colorful. "Tone it down..." She moved from row to row of outfits, unable to find anything until her eye fell on a particular dress that hung at the end of one of the racks. Lucina pulled it out, holding it with outstretched hands so she should see it better. The dress was pure white with a decorative belt on the waist, and stretched down to her knees in length. It was simple and had nothing particularly special about it, but the dress charmed her nonetheless.

"Robin...", she called out, weaving through rows of clothes to eventually find him still intensely searching. "How does this one look?" she asked hesitantly as she held the dress over her, fearful that he would react like he had to the other one.

Robin glanced over his shoulder. "...I actually really like that one. It's a very pretty dress," he said with a smile, then returned the few dresses that he personally had picked out back to the racks. "I think we have our winner!"

"Did I just hear someone say they found something they liked?" an eager voice shrilled. All of a sudden, Anna leapt out from behind her stand and rushed over to them.

"Anna? What are you doing..., oh right, you're one of Anna's other sisters."

"That's right!" Anna put her finger on her chin in her trademark pose. "As long as you're referring to my sister Anna rather than my other sisters Anna or Anna. You also may have met Anna - she's over there selling hair accessories." All of the Annas were sisters and looked identical to one another, so it was impossible to tell them apart.

"Right, anyways..." Robin shifted the subject. "We were thinking of getting this dress. Do you have a place where she could try it on?"

"Oh, of course!" Anna giggled. "Excellent selection by the way. The customer is always right! That's what I say!"

"Yeah...", Robin looked unsure of how to respond. "So, where can she change?"

"Changing tent's right over here behind my stand," Anna pointed, motioning to them to follow her.

"Thank you. You don't mind trying it on, do you Lucina?"

"I'm excited to," Lucina assured, and she followed Anna and Robin with the dress in tow.

"Right in here!" Anna opened the flap to the tent, allowing Lucina to step inside before closing it. "I'll leave you two to your privacy for moment," she whispered to Robin before darting off to greet another unsuspecting customer.

The tent was rather small on the inside, so it took Lucina a while to wriggle out of her clothes and into the dress without causing the whole tent to collapse in on her. Her boots didn't quite fit with the dress, so she couldn't think of any other option but to go barefoot for the moment. She glanced at the mirror in the corner of the tent when she was finished. Lucina didn't recognize the person she saw looking back at her. The girl in the mirror was elegant and happy, with a radiant smile and rosy cheeks. Her azure blue hair fell in drapes over her bare shoulders, and the dress she wore flowed perfectly with her body. Lucina put a hand over her chest in wonder, and the reflected girl did so as well. Was that really her? She looked so different than the Lucina she knew. She parted with the other girl, poking the tent flap open just a little bit.

"Robin? I'm coming out," she said in a small voice.

"I'm waiting out here," Robin called back, sounding eager to see her.

Lucina took a deep breath, and then slipped out of the tent into the open. If removing Falchion from her side made her feel exposed, wearing the dress doubled that experience. The air gently touched the skin that the dress revealed for the first time. She felt embarrassed that her arms and shoulders still bore faint cuts and scabs from numerous battles. It didn't seem proper to show.

"This is me," Lucina's voice quivered as she held her both her arms by her sides with palms open. "Do I... look okay?"

Robin froze where he stood with his mouth held ever so slightly agape. He didn't speak for a moment, then whispered, "You... you look beautiful..."

"Does the dress... make up for the rest of me?"

"I wasn't talking about the dress," Robin's awed voice spoke slowly. "I mean, the dress is amazing, but you... You're more stunning than I ever could have imagined."

Lucina's cheeks blazed pink. "I'm sorry that my skin is so displeasing to look at..." She felt a tear well up in her eye as she ran through a mental list of imperfections.

"...Your skin?" Robin asked in confusion as he walked towards her and put both his hands on her shoulders. Her bruised body shivered with his direct touch. "Lucina, I don't care about that. You couldn't be more perfect to me," Robin told her, then leaned down and kissed her on her forehead. "I love you."

Hearing the words flow out of Robin's mouth made Lucina forget why she was sad, and replaced that feeling with joy. "I love you too."

"Now let's buy you this dress, shall we?" Robin playfully tapped her on the nose with one finger.

"Yes, let's," Lucina laughed. She darted back inside the tent and removed the dress so she could change back into her regular clothes. When she emerged cradling the dress in her hands, Robin was already at the counter talking with Anna. Even from a short distance, she could tell that he didn't look happy.

"It's *how* much?!" Lucina heard him ask Anna incredulously.

"You heard me," Anna folded her arms and pouted. "That particular dress was imported from a distant land and is made of incredibly high quality materials."

"It couldn't possibly cost that much!"

"What's the matter?" Lucina asked when she got closer.

"Lucina, you aren't going to believe how much she wants for that dress!" When Robin told her the exact price, Lucina almost dropped the dress onto the street in shock. How was Anna even letting her touch something worth so much?

"That's... that's expensive!" was all she could manage.

"Anna, we have to work something out. That price is insane!"

"Nope. The price is final," Anna declared, cutting Robin short.

"But...", Robin began to argue again, but Lucina touched his arm.

"Robin, this dress is much too expensive. I really don't need it right now - maybe next time if we ever come back," she told him, handing the dress back to Anna.

"But you love that dress! We came all the way to town so we could look for one for you!

"We can't afford it right now, but that's okay. Maybe we can find something else at another shop."

"Lucina..."

"It's okay, Robin. It's only a dress."

"...If you say so...", Robin reluctantly agreed as he stepped away from the counter, shooting Anna a dirty look before turning back to Lucina.

"We can go look somewhere else!" Lucina assured him, taking Robin's hand and leading him away from the stand and back into the crowd. "How about over there?" she asked, pointing out another shop that was selling clothes. Robin didn't seem all too enthusiastic, but allowed Lucina to bring him.

Lucina didn't realize how upset that the ordeal had made Robin. She would have to search for something else that she liked to take his mind off of it soon. Lucina was shoving through the hordes of people in an attempt to reach the clothing store faster when Robin suddenly uttered a sharp cry of pain and let go of her hand. She turned around to find Robin hunched over on the ground, clutching his head in both his hands and looking very pale.

"Robin! What happened!" she shouted in panic, kneeling to get to eye level with him. "Did someone stab you?! Are you hurt?!" Robin couldn't speak; his teeth were clenched tightly and he couldn't open his mouth.

"Medic! I need a medic!" Lucina called out desperately to the crowd before Robin clutched her arm.

"I'm... I'm fine...", Robin gasped. His breathing was still labored, but he didn't look as sickly as he had a few seconds ago. "It's just... just a bad headache. I've been getting them... a lot."

"Robin, that wasn't just an ordinary headache! You scared me half to death! I thought you were going to die!"

"I can't control them... I'm sorry..."

"Can I get you anything?" Lucina asked out of nervousness, scanning her immediate surroundings for anything that could be of assistance. "Maybe you just need some sugar," she suggested, viewing a tiny bakery on the side of the street. "Here, let's get you out of this crowd. Can you walk if I help you?"

"I think so...", Robin said, uneasily getting up on two feet using Lucina's shoulder as a crutch. Lucina led him a side street just to the side of the bakery and sat him down on a low stone wall to rest. She then hurried inside and purchased two cupcakes before returning. Sitting down next to Robin, Lucina handed him one. "Here, try to eat this. Maybe the sugar will perk you up," she informed him.

Robin graciously accepted the food and took a few small bites. Lucina couldn't think about eating her own until she was sure he looked well enough. His face was flushed with color like normal again, and he didn't seem to be in pain anymore. "I feel much better now. Thank you, Lucina."

"That's a relief," Lucina sighed and finally took a bite of her own cupcake. "These taste quite good, don't you think?"

"They're very delicious," Robin agreed, then suddenly jumped up off the wall and placed his cupcake down where he was sitting.

"Hold that thought. I'll be right back. I think I left my book that I bought back at Anna's stand. Save my cupcake for me," he told her as he began to walk back from whence they had come.

"Ah, wait! Are you sure you're okay to be walking by yourself so soon?" Lucina worriedly asked.

"I'll be okay now. I promise I'll return before you know it!" Robin reassured as he vanished into the crowd. Honestly, for someone who was so concerned for other peoples' safety Robin seemed content with risking his own. She didn't feel like eating again, so she simply sat on the wall and kicked the empty air. After a much longer time than she expected, Robin returned not with his book but with a thin rectangular box in his hands.

"What's that, Robin? Where's your book?" she asked him confusedly.

Robin scratched the back of his head with one hand, looking slightly ashamed. "About that... What I said wasn't exactly true - I still have my book. This is for you." He held the box out to her for her to take.

Lucina feared that she knew what the box contained, but he seemed insistent. She gingerly opened the lid to find the very

same white dress that she had worn nestled inside.

"Oh Robin, how could you? How on earth did you pay for this?" Lucina gasped.

"You don't think Chrom doesn't pay me a little something for being his chief tactician, do you?" he grinned. "I rarely ever spend it, so I just remembered that I had a lot saved up for something special."

"Robin! Please return this! This must have cost you everything you had!" Lucina exclaimed, closing the box and trying to hand it back to him.

Robin pushed it away back to her. "A lot, but not *everything*."

"I need to get you something then! What do you want? I'll buy you anything!" Lucina hurriedly took out the little pouch of gold she carried with her.

"Calm down, Lucina. When you wore that dress I saw how happy it made you, and that made me happy too. I don't need anything else," he smiled, sitting back down on the wall next to her.

Lucina didn't know what to do. She couldn't possibly accept this gift without giving him something in return. Anything. She pondered for a moment, and even though it wasn't near worth as much as the dress, it was the only thing she could think of. "Robin, I think you have some icing on your lip."

"I do? That's embarra...", he stopped as Lucina reached over and kissed him.

"I got it," Lucina smiled, making him laugh.

"Twice in one day. I'm a lucky man!" he sighed.

Lucina opened the box again and touched the soft fabric of the dress. "Did I tell you that I love you?"

"I don't remember. Maybe you could remind me again."

I told you it was really fluffy... Lucina must be in a *really* good mood today for her to feel confident enough to initiate a kiss! Bear with me if fluff isn't your thing - this is the most you'll get for quite some time! Next chapter is Plegia, kingdom of drama.

What do you think? A suitable chapter for a first date? If you didn't realize it immediately or wanted to know what it looks like, the dress that Lucina gets is the same one that she wears on the cover art for the official soundtrack of the game!

Also, I want to give a big shout out to RandomificationChaotic, who generously offered to help me edit this story to fix any errors and make the story flow better! Thanks so much!

Chapter 7: To Every End A Beginning

Okay, I kind of lied. They don't actually go to Plegia in this chapter yet. This one is a transition from Valm to the Ylissean continent instead. I felt like there needed to be *one* more character and relationship growth chapter before important things actually happen. This chapter is a whole bunch of little scenes including overprotective Robin and everyone's favorite swellsword - enjoy!

In which Lucina goes to dinner and the Shepherds receive a foreboding invitation.

Chapter 7 – To Every End A Beginning

The following day, the Shepherds made their final preparations for departure from the Valmese continent, disassembling what remained of the camp so it could be packed away. As they marched to port, the army was greeted by applause and cheer from hundreds of townspeople; Valmese of young and old had come to see the Shepherds on their way.

"I cannot thank you and Ylisse enough, good prince," Say'ri gave a short bow to Chrom as the Shepards boarded the ship that was to bring them home.

"You're most welcome," Chrom smiled and attempted a bow of his own in to mimic her courtesy. "I'm leaving the rebuilding of the continent to you if you think you can manage."

Say'ri's eyes flashed with confidence. "I assure you, sir. I will stop at nothing to return my country of Chon'sin to its former glory and bring lasting peace to Valm."

Chrom laughed and replied, "I'm sure you'll have it under control. If you ever need anything else, don't hesitate to call on us for assistance. We would be happy to help."

"Fie, prince! It is us who should be extending that offer to you. My people and I will be forever in your debt. Should Ylisse find herself in trouble, only Chon'sin's bravest warriors will come to her aid."

"I won't forget, I assure you. Until another day." Chrom told her before departing up the gangplank to the ship's deck.

"Farewell, my friends!" Say'ri waved to the Shepherds as the ship crawled out of port and into the vast expanse of the sea. "May the winds of fortune guide your sails safely home!"

Lucina knelt on the wooden floor and reached into the chest by her bedside. She brushed her nightclothes aside to expose the small box she had placed underneath. Carefully she removed it from its hiding place and opened the lid to steal a glimpse of her new dress. It was still just as perfect as she had left it from the previous day. She didn't dare take it out to wear it despite how much she wanted to; people surely would notice and figure out who had bought it for her. Even looking at the dress seemed like a forbidden act, but it was this risk of being discovered that gave her all the more thrill whenever she didn't get caught. Lucina knew it was foolish to think that way, but the dress made her happy and reminded her of the time she shared with Robin. Smiling at the memory, she gently closed the box again and placed it back into the chest, being sure to cover it up with her other clothes just in case.

"Knock knock, I'm coming in."

Lucina slammed the chest shut in surprise and turned around to find Robin standing in the doorway.

"Robin, what are you up to this evening?" Lucina asked him as she stood up.

"Well," Robin began as he strolled into Lucina's cabin. "As you probably know it's that time of the night again, but today I came to bring you to dinner with me."

"Dinner? Is it that time already?" It seemed like they had just boarded the ship a few minutes ago. She must have taken longer to organize her belongings than she thought.

"Sure is. Come on!" Robin took Lucina by the wrist and started to walk out, but she didn't budge from where she stood.

"Robin... You know how I am with these sorts of things..." She hesitated, pulling back on Robin's hand.

"I know," Robin sighed softly. "But could you please come just this once? Everyone there is our friend. You'll enjoy yourself." He saw Lucina was still hesitant, so added, "For me?"

That got her. How could she say no to that smile?

"Maybe... if it's only this one time..."

"Great! Let's go!" he tried to pull her out of the room again.

"But wait! If we go in together, my father might notice!" Lucina told him in concern, wanting to take all precautionary measures she could against Chrom finding out about their relationship.

Robin paused to think for a moment. "How about I enter first, then you go in a few minutes afterword. I'll save you a seat."

"That sounds like a good strategy," Lucina considered the option.

"Strategy is my job! I'd hope I'm good at it!" Robin laughed and let go of Lucina's arm. "I'll go there now. See you in a few minutes," he told her as he stepped out of the cabin and into the hallway. Before he was out the door he paused and turned around. "You're definitely coming, right?"

Lucina grinned. "Yes, I'm coming," she sighed.

"Just making sure," Robin excitedly informed her before disappearing down the hallway.

She would be fine, wouldn't she? Robin was right: even if it wasn't that well, she knew everyone there. She didn't have to get so anxious over going. Besides, he was saving her a seat.

He didn't have a seat for her. People already surrounded Robin's table and left no empty seats. Lucina looked at him with budding panic in her eyes. Where would she possibly go? She had only come because he had wanted her to. Robin met her gaze with guilt written all over his face. He made a quick head gesture towards Sumia, as if silently trying to tell her that she took the seat he was trying to hold. Lucina couldn't possibly ask for her mother of all people to get up and move so she could sit next to Robin. Looking around the room, she couldn't find any two empty seats side by side, nor did she think she could leave now that she had shown up. She turned back to Robin briefly, who now looked as if he was trying to send her a telepathic "I'm sorry," before she began searching for somewhere else to sit.

After wandering around the room numerous times, she still could only find one open seat at the end of a table; it was next to Stahl and across from Gregor. She hardly knew either of them well, but she had no other option at the moment. Lucina awkwardly sat down as soon as the two both erupted into laughter from something Gregor had said. They still hadn't noticed her arrive until she gave a weak greeting.

"H... hello."

"Hmm?" Stahl wiped a tear from his eye from laughing so hard, and was surprised to find Lucina of all people sitting next to him. "Oh, hello Lucina. I didn't know you were here. This is the first time I think I've ever seen you around dinnertime actually."

"Yes... About that..." Lucina didn't want to explain to them exactly why she avoided mealtimes so often, so she tried to change the subject as soon as possible. "Um, if you don't mind me asking... I was a little curious of what you were just laughing so hard about," she asked as she attempted an uncomfortable smile.

"Heh heh!" Gregor chuckled. "Is all right for Gregor to tell story again?" the man asked Stahl in his thick accent.

"Go right ahead. I sure wouldn't mind hearing it another time," Stahl grinned.

"No! Don't tell it again! It was humiliating enough the first time!" Another voice shouted in complaint from across the table. Lucina hadn't even realized Ricken, who was pouting and very red in the face, seated next to Gregor.

"Ha! Do not worry, little friend!" Gregor patted Ricken on the head as if he found the boy's protests rather amusing. "Is very good story! Princess will like. It was having the starting when Shepherds get day off, yes?"

"Here we go..." Ricken pulled his hat slightly down over his face in shame. "And don't call me little!" he peeped, but Gregor didn't hear him. The older man was already engrossed in his story telling.

"Gregor amusing himself in festivities of town when he was approached by crazy lady. She grabbed the hand of Gregor and then ask Gregor if he wanted to marry her!"

"Marry you?" Lucina raised her eyebrow. "But she just met you."

"This lady very drunk," Gregor explained. "So drunk that baby deer could stand better than she. Very bad. Anyways, obviously Gregor tell her no! But unfortunately for Gregor, she was not having the no for answer. She asked and asked until Gregor say he think about it. To get away from her, yes? She said that she would come to find Gregor soon when he was having the decision, so Gregor did not know what to be doing. But when hope for Gregor almost lost, Gregor found his friend Ricken!"

Stahl snickered at the mention of Ricken's name, making Gregor smile widely. It was as if both simultaneously knew they had reached the good part of the story.

"So like Gregor was having the saying, he get brilliant idea when he saw his little friend. Gregor think he can be fooling crazy lady, so..." The man looked about ready to burst into laughter again and was doing his best to hold it back. "So... he tell Ricken..." Gregor got up off his seat to act out what he had said. "He says, little Ricken," he mock instructed with his pointer finger. "You have to be pretending to be Gregor's... Gregor's girlfriend now!" With that both he and Stahl broke out into laughs again while Ricken only pulled his hat down more.

"What?" Lucina asked incredulously, an actual smile beginning to form on her lips. "You asked him to pretend to be your girlfriend? So you had him dress up and everything?!"

"Yes!" Gregor guffawed loud enough for the entire room. "With blue dress and long blonde wig down to here." He gestured to his hip for comparison.

"A wig too?!" The mental image of Ricken dressed up as a girl like how Gregor had described manifested in her mind, and Lucina couldn't help but laugh a little. "Did it work?"

"Oh, yes! Lady leave Gregor alone when she see him with Ricken. Little friend makes very pretty girl," he replied, still laughing heartily.

"Don't laugh! That was probably the most humiliating thing I've ever had to do!" Ricken cried out.

"Why not? Is funny!" Gregor gave Ricken a friendly slap on the back, which due to Ricken's small stature acted more like a punch to the gut and knocked the wind out of him.

"Please... stop...," the boy asked in desperation as he gasped for air.

"Sorry, Ricken," Stahl apologized. He was trying to calm himself down but was still very giggly. "It's just hilarious! Even better the second time around!" He looked back down at his almost completely eaten meal before his eye caught the empty place next to him. "Hey, Lucina. You still haven't gotten any food yet! Gosh, I would be starving if I was you."

"Yes, yes. Get dinner," Gregor agreed. "Soup is very good tonight."

"I'll keep that in mind," Lucina replied as she got up off her seat and went into the small kitchen connected to the dining hall. She wasn't even that hungry, but she still put enough on her plate to create a fairly balanced meal while also making sure to get a small portion of the supposedly delicious soup. As Lucina was walking back to her seat, she caught sight of Robin watching her from the other side of the room, but when she made eye contact he turned away immediately as if he hadn't been.

What had gotten into him all of a sudden?

Lucina placed her tray on the table and sat down with the question lingering in her mind. Stahl and Gregor had gone back to eating and gave her some time her eat some her own meal before speaking up again.

"How about Princess?" Gregor wondered out loud. "Have any funny stories?"

"Hmm? Funnystories? I... I only have grim ones..."

Stahl was stoic for a moment afterwards, recognizing that it was a touchy subject. "Well, how about anything that's happened since you came here? There has to be one thing that was pretty funny."

"Um...", Lucina pondered as she tried to think of something. "I guess... there was this one time when my father was trying to eat an orange."

"Orange?"

Lucina smiled when she thought about it more. "He was trying to eat it without peeling it. I don't think he knew how."

"Really? Did he actually eat it?" Stahl grinned.

"Whole thing. Skin and all."

"Heh heh!" Gregor chortled. "Gregor not sure if he have as much confidence in leader now if he cannot peel mere orange!"

Lucina gritted her teeth as her little story didn't seem that funny anymore. "No! That isn't what I meant! My father..."

"Ha! Relax! Was jest. Gregor just kidding," Gregor assured. "Your father very good leader."

Lucina sighed in relief. The last thing she had wanted was to turn anyone against her father. She wasn't the best at saying what she actually felt about things, so she was always worried she would say something that may be taken the wrong way.

"Speaking of eating..." Stahl popped another bread roll into his mouth. "Gregor, remember that time when we ate all that ice cream?"

"Oy! It make Gregor's stomach hurt to be thinking about it!" the man exclaimed.

"What happened?" Lucina questioned.

"Well..."

Lucina was so preoccupied with everyone telling stories that dessert was already being served before she knew it. Gaius had baked what he called a "victory cake," and Stahl offered to go up and get some for the three of them. He came back from the kitchen with two small slices and another empty plate.

"Where's your cake, Stahl?" Lucina asked him as he gave her and Gregor the two remaining pieces.

"Oh, that," Stahl scratched his messy hair. "I... got kind of hungry and ate mine on the way here."

"Heh! Stahl cannot help himself!" Gregor laughed.

"I guess not."

Lucina took a small bite of her own slice and was pleasantly surprised. Gaius's taste in sweets certainly didn't fail him when he baked this particular cake. She apparently couldn't help herself either, for the dessert was gone in a few bites.

"I'll clean up," Lucina volunteered, and she put the three plates into a neat pile before getting up and bringing them back into the kitchen to be washed. When she returned back to her seat however, she found another piece of cake waiting for her.

"Where did this come from?" she slowly sat down, looking at the second dessert in confusion. "I already finished mine..."

"Huh?" Stahl turned around and looked just as perplexed as she was. "That's odd. I didn't see anyone put it there. And nothing personal or anything, but I probably would have eaten it if I did... I'm still hungry..."

Gregor frowned and rubbed his chin. "Is mystery... Maybe Princess have secret admirer, yes? Ha ha!" he joked.

"Secret admirer..." She turned around in her seat to search for Robin. He was casually whistling where he sat, all the while glancing over at her to see whether she had noticed yet. Lucina smiled and rolled her eyes as she turned back to the table. "Maybe..." She obviously couldn't tell them who she actually thought it was.

As everyone leaving for the night, Robin rushed over to Lucina as soon as he could.

"Sorry for the seat!" he apologized, looking quite embarrassed with himself. "Sumia sat down right before you got there, and I couldn't think of any way to get her to move without her becoming suspicious... Were you okay?"

"I was fine," she assured. "I was just listening to stories with Stahl and Gregor. It was actually kind of fun."

"...That's good... I was just... you know..." he stammered, lowering his voice to a whisper that she had to strain to hear. "Kind of hoping for you to spend some more time with me..."

Lucina cocked her head to the side questioningly, and then grinned. "Robin... Don't tell me you're jealous! Of Stahl and Gregor!"

"Jealous! What?! No, no way! I would never!" Robin hurriedly replied in defense.

"You are aren't you! I didn't know you were the kind of person who would get jealous!"

"No, I'm not! I... wanted to have dinner with you myself," he responded weakly.

"That's called being jealous, Robin."

"...Okay, maybe I was a little..." he admitted.

"Robin, Stahl is already married and Gregor is more than three times my age. How could you be jealous of them?"

"It's just like I was saying before. Anyone who gets to spend time with you is lucky..."

"You're so sweet," Lucina smiled and grabbed his arm in reassurance. "By the way, who was it exactly who gave me an extra piece of cake?" she asked playfully.

She got a grin out of Robin with that question. "Gosh, I wouldn't know!" he dramatically shrugged. "I mean, if I was a betting man I would say that it was probably someone who likes you very much."

"I wonder who that could be..." Lucina laughed. "Dinner tomorrow then. But you'd better save me a seat!"

"Don't worry! We can go early so I won't make that mistake again," Robin told her, and then realized that they had already arrived at Lucina's cabin. "Well, my room's the other way. Good night."

"Good night," Lucina repeated. "Thank you for caring about me so much." She took a few steps into her room, but got an idea to cheer him up. She ran back out into the hall to give a Robin a kiss on the cheek before he left. He certainly wasn't expecting it, so she succeeded in making him blush fiercely. Lucina giggled at his surprised look and hurried back into her cabin and closed the door before he could say anything else. She threw herself onto her bed and put her hands behind her head. She remained there unmoving for quite a while, contentedly thinking about nonsensical things they could do together when they arrived back in Ylisse.

The next night she and Robin started a friendly competition, a game of sorts, in which Robin attempted to smuggle her his dessert and she tried to catch him in the act. Lucina wasn't able to do so at first, for Robin was sneakier than she expected and somehow slipped the food under her nose every time. She eventually grew wise of his schemes and did manage to stop him twice near the end of the week they spent at sea, even though he still gave her his dessert afterwards.

"So what was the final score? Robin five, Lucina two?" he asked as they walked down the gangplank into the Feroxi port.

"Yes... As much as I'm happy to be back, I'm still a little grumpy about that. I was just getting good at beating you when we arrived!" Lucina complained like a child would after losing a game.

"Doesn't matter though," he grinned triumphantly. "I still beat you."

"Oh, come on. You're mean!" she pouted, but the stupid face Robin was making prevented her from doing so for too long.

"I'm going to go help fill the convoy with everyone's things," he told her, walking over to the growing pile of the Shepherds' belongings being unloaded onto the dock.

"I'll be there in a minute," she called back distractedly. Lucina thought she had seen someone in the crowd that made her feel uneasy, so she looked again more carefully as Robin departed. Sure enough, she spotted the same hooded man that she had just noticed a second ago walking towards them slowly. He looked like he could be a spy judging from the dark clothes, but he didn't seem to care about hiding. Even still, there was some air to him that Lucina didn't like at all. She found her father amongst the other Shepherds and warned him of the man's approach.

"Is that so?" Chrom asked. "Frederick." He made a beckoning motion to his loyal guard, who promptly joined his side to intercept the man before he could come any closer. Lucina watched from a few feet away, not wanting to meet the man but ready to attack if he attempted anything.

"Greetings, sir," Chrom called out. "You look as if you want to tell us something."

"Good day, noble prince," the man spoke with a dull voice and gave an unenthusiastic bow. "I speak on behalf of King Validar of Plegia. He has an urgent message that he sent me to deliver to you.

Chrom raised his eyebrow but allowed him to continue. "I'm listening."

The man unraveled a piece of parchment tucked away in his cloak, but didn't bother to read the entire message. "His Majesty wishes to inform you that he would like to give you Sable, the last of the Gemstones for the Fire Emblem that Plegia has guarded since ancient times. He formally requests you to come to Plegia so that he could give it to you."

"Hold a moment," Frederick stopped him. "How did you know that milord has acquired four of the five Gemstones for the Fire Emblem?"

"I am but a humble messenger. I do not know how my master had come upon that particular information," he growled, but the tone of his voice seemed to contradict his statement. Lucina was fairly certain he knew perfectly well.

"Why couldn't he just have sent it with you?" Chrom asked, growing suspicious himself.

"His Majesty apologizes, but he feared that it may be lost or stolen along the way. He humbly wishes to bestow the Gemstone to you personally, so that he can..." He paused as if forgetting what he was meant to say, then hissed, "Assure that you receive it safely."

"I see... Thank you for your message," Chrom replied.

"You are very welcome, milord," the man bowed again. "I will send word to His Majesty to expect your arrival soon," he said before vanishing into the crowd once more.

Chrom and Frederick turned away from where the man had left and started walking back towards the ship with Lucina meeting up with them along the way.

"Robin!" Chrom called his tactician over and informed him everything of what the Plegian man had told them.

"It's definitely a trap," Robin spoke at last in a low whisper.

"Yes, probably," Chrom sighed. "But we don't have any other options at this point. We must complete the Fire Emblem if we wish to prevent the fell dragon from rising, and we cannot do so without all five of the Gemstones. If Validar doesn't give us the stone, he may at least reveal its whereabouts."

"I don't have a very good feeling about this, Father," Lucina told him quietly.

"Neither do I," he agreed.

"May I suggest that you leave the Fire Emblem somewhere safe, milord?" Frederick contributed to the conversation.

"Then Validar would be unable to take it from you should he decide to change his mind."

"Unless that's what he wants us to think," Chrom told him. "Then he could steal it while my best men are away. It's safer here with me for the time being."

"Yes, I respect your decision, milord," Frederick agreed.

"I hate to do this after we just won a war," Chrom began. "But I fear we must go to Plegia as soon as we can."

"But we can't do nothing to protect ourselves, Father!" Lucina exclaimed.

"Don't worry, Lucina. I'll be sure all the Shepherds are fully armed and ready before we get anywhere near that castle."

"Would you like me to inform the others, milord?" Frederick asked.

"No, not yet Frederick. Let's wait until we all get organized before breaking the news."

"Indeed. I will assist in preparations now," the knight responded before leaving to give commands to the other Shepherds who were loading the convoy.

"Hmm..." Robin murmured. He was being remarkably quiet for something this important. "Chrom..." he asked. "May I speak with you for a moment?"

"I know better to ask questions when you have that look in your eyes..." Chrom agreed, and the two of them walked away

to find someplace more private, speaking in hushed undertones all the while.

Lucina had no idea what Robin was planning, but like her father had already said himself she knew better to question him. She frowned and her hand instinctively found Falchion's hilt resting at her side. She had allowed herself to be more lax in her duties the past few weeks, but now she could not afford that luxury. Whatever happened in Plegia, Lucina knew that the outcome would either change her fate or seal it.

Gregor... The most lovely dialogue in the entire game... All of their conversations at the dinner table are from actual supports by the way! Did you catch any of them?

As well as Robin feeling jealous, because he definitely would.

So if you haven't picked up on it yet or was a little confused on why Lucina has been acting differently in these past two chapters (besides the fact that Robin kissed her) is that I have this headcanon of sorts in both this fanfic and in the actual game itself that Lucina is serious and determined and whatnot almost all the time, but when she has a day off or time to herself she's actually pretty lovey-dovey. I think I get that feeling from how in Lucina's supports and actions it seems like her personality is a mix of that between adult and child. She's very adult-like in her goals and determination to succeed, but she also has childish moments such as when she gets excited over her mother's (very beautiful) polka dot Emmeryn dress. That's why she gets excited over little things, like feeling rebellious for owning the dress Robin got her, that you wouldn't usually see in a serious person. Also she doesn't want to lose anyone close to her again after her parents the first time, so she feels happy when she's around Robin and kind of "clings" to him.

She reverts back to her more serious, adult-like self at the end of this chapter now that they're actually going to Plegia and her mission is once again taking center stage of her life (even though I prefer writing with her "alter ego" if you will). Sorry if Robin and Lucina's scenes together seem kind of fluffy all the time. They're my personal OTP after all and I like writing about them in that way - very light-hearted and emotionally intertwined. Brings out the inner romantic in me I guess...

All of the older chapters (1-5) have been edited slightly to improve problems with grammar and to help the overall flow of the story better if you want to check them out. Also I realized I was spelling "Shepherds" wrong this whole time so I should have fixed all of those (I'm so embarrassed I'm sorry...) Let me know if you see any that I missed so I can correct them.

To finish up this incredibly long endnote, going to Plegia is next chapter actually this time. Drama can begin once again... finally...

Chapter 8: The Spider's Web

In which the Shepherds go to Plegia and Robin begins acting strangely

Chapter 8 – The Spider's Web

The Shepherds had hardly had time to rest in Yisstol before Chrom decided to break the news about their summons to Plegia. They were finally nearing the end of their long march through the desert, but it was clear that the intense heat was taking its toll on their strength. Even though she was on horseback and didn't have to spend energy trudging through the sands, Lucina was so tired she would have been perfectly content with lying down and going to sleep. As tempting as a nap sounded, she reminded herself that the success of her mission to save the future could potentially be attained in the Plegian castle, so she couldn't afford a break now. The sun however had no intention of providing her relief before this critical moment; if Lucina wasn't concerned with looking ridiculous and throwing her pride away, she may have even held her cape over her head as feeble protection from the relentless rays.

"Hey, Lucina!" Severa's voice suddenly rang out from behind her, and the girl pulled her horse up side by side with Lucina's. "Good gods it's hot, isn't it?"

Lucina was too exhausted to give an actual response and simply grunted to acknowledge her.

"Well..." Severa began after a tired silence. "You know why I'm here..."

"Actually, no," Lucina sighed. "Nothing personal or anything, but if you're going to complain about something please save it for another time. I'm not in the mood today."

The girl's eyes narrowed in annoyance. "Geez, is that what you think I do *all* day?!" she asked as she began to raise her voice. "Well I'll have you know, I don't just complain about things: I take action on my everyday grievances too and yell at the people who annoy me. Also I spend a lot of time trying to make myself look presentable after all the stupid chores I have to do."

"Sorry that I offended you." Lucina didn't understand how she wasn't already used to this conversation with Severa yet.

"And it doesn't help that I'm sweating like crazy, which is making my hair get all sticky and disgusting," Severa groaned, wiping a damp strand away that clung to her forehead. "But whatever. Like I was saying, I'm here to talk about your boyfrie..."

"Shhh!" Lucina scolded and put her finger to her lips, immediately alert. She glanced around her to check and see if Severa had caught anyone's attention, then spoke in a harsh whisper. "What were you thinking?! Someone definitely could have heard you!"

"Sorry!" Severa lowered her tone as well and gave a guilty smile. "Really though -can you tell me who he is yet? I'm *dying* to know."

"Severa, be serious. You know this mission is important."

"I know that, and I *am* being serious! Love is serious stuff. Now tell me who he is!" she begged.

Lucina rolled her eyes at the girl's childish insistence. "I can't and won't tell anyone right now. My father mustn't find out."

"What did I warn you about not telling anyone, Lucina?" Severa pointed at her in accusation. "You won't be able to take it eventually if you force your feelings down all the time. I saw it almost happen to my mother before Father came around, and I'm not about to let the same thing happen to you!"

"I have to... I'm not ready..."

Severa cocked her head to one side and sighed deeply. "I know these emotional things aren't easy for you, but I'm going to tell you this again. At least let someone else know that you trust, even if it's just the little bit that you told me. It will help you cope with it until you are ready." She saw that Lucina was becoming uncomfortable, so she lessened her demands. "How about this: one question. I'll leave you alone if you tell me if he's told you that he likes you yet."

Lucina hesitated, unsure of whether or not to respond, but decided there was no harm in letting her know to satisfy her appetite for information. "Yes, he has," she smiled a little at the thought.

"And did you tell him how you felt?"

Lucina nodded in agreement, deciding against reminding Severa that she had asked more than one question.

"Way to go, girl! I thought that's why you were happier on the trip back. Perfect, like usual," Severa grinned briefly before her lips fell back into her usual frown. "And speaking of perfect, I haven't yelled at my mother for hours. She probably misses me." The girl glared in Cordelia's direction at the far end of the group. "Look at her. Not a care in the world because she's so darn great. She's probably bragging about her latest achievements or something."

"Severa, I've never heard Cordelia brag about anything. She's too modest."

"Well, there's a first for everything," Severa took hold of her horse's reins more tightly and began to turn in her mother's direction. "I'll see you around I guess, and you'd better be ready to tell me by then!"

"We'll see," Lucina responded tiredly as Severa merged with the rest of crowd.

It could have been five minutes after Severa left or it could have been an hour. The sun was still ever present in the cloudless sky and Lucina had lost track of time. She allowed her eyes to wander to see how the other Shepherds were faring, and she caught sight of Panne with Yarne following close behind. Panne was opposed to harnessing the power of any other beast to assist her in work that she was able to do herself, which included riding horses for transportation. Therefore, she insisted on walking and commanded her son to do the same if he was to follow taguel customs. Lucina respected the fact that her decision was based off of the reverence that taguels held for other beasts of the earth, but if any of the Shepherds needed the most relief from exhaustion it was probably her and Yarne. Lucina winced at the thought of having a taguel's insulating fur on top of the blistering heat, and suddenly her own issue with the weather seemed much less problematic.

She was still appreciating the fact that she wasn't a taguel at the moment when she heard her father call her from the front of the group.

"Lucina," he beckoned. "Come ride with us."

He was referring to himself and Robin, who had shed his coat in an attempt to keep cool. As Lucina urged her horse to speed up its pace slightly to catch up with Chrom at the front of the group, she reminisced on the time in Valm when Robin had taken her into town and found herself in the same mental struggle regarding his appearance. *Alright, fine. I do find him attractive*, Lucina admitted to herself. *But that's no reason to lose your focus*. Despite her feeble protests, she was still getting distracted.

"Is anything the matter, Father?" she asked in an attempt to take her mind off it.

"No... I just wanted to make sure that you were feeling up to this today. I mean, you've been working yourself more than usual lately, and I'm concerned that you may be too tired for this mission."

"I've been working hard in preparation for this mission, Father," she sighed in exasperation. "Of course I'm up to it."

"You have been training all day and going to bed very late ever since we arrived in Ylisse," Robin added quietly. "You can sit out if you need rest."

"Robin's right," Chrom agreed. "All of that work isn't going to do you much good if you don't have the energy to apply it."

"Father, you know that I can't stand back during a time as crucial to my future's change as this." She then shifted the conversation towards the tactician. "Besides, you don't sound too bursting with energy yourself, Robin."

Robin didn't reply for a moment. "My head has just been bothering me recently. I shouldn't be complaining about it though."

Lucina frowned, recalling the last time that Robin had mentioned having the same problem to her. "But, your headaches can get bad..." She was going to remind him of how she had to practically lift him from the ground when he experienced that one terrible headache, but remembered that Chrom was present and couldn't know about their date.

"...Don't worry about me. It's really no big deal," Robin reassured, but Lucina wasn't entirely convinced. She was about to argue with him when she heard her father sigh in relief to himself.

"Finally..."

"What is it, Father?"

"There it is," Chrom pointed in the distance. The intense heat made the very air shimmer and Lucina had to squint to see, but the Plegian capitol was slowly coming into view. "I don't know about you, but I've had enough travelling through this godforsaken desert."

As they grew nearer, Lucina would have been relieved to see the castle as well if not for its surroundings. Plegia Castle was nestled within giant skeletal structures half buried in the sand that made her feel very uneasy.

"That massive skull..." she observed bleakly. "It reminds me... of him."

"Who?" Chrom asked then immediately realized the answer. "Grima."

"Yes..." Lucina gritted her teeth at the mention of the fell dragon's name. "I saw it when Emmeryn... died as well. Even though I can't say for certain whether or not those are his real bones or just likenesses for worship by the Grimleal, but the resemblance is... uncanny."

"We won't let him come back, Lucina," Chrom assured her. "I'm not about to let that happen, and neither are any of the other Shepherds. We will succeed."

"...Thank you, Father. I hope you're right." She turned away from the skull; the very sight of it spurred a torrent of terrible memories that she wasn't willing to relive if she could help it.

Robin held his horse steady, even after Chrom began to move forward again. He was still glaring at the Plegian castle as if something about it troubled him as well. Lucina waited until Chrom was out of immediate earshot to speak with him more directly.

"Robin, you haven't been yourself recently either... Is there something wrong? You can tell me."

The tactician was silent, as if the fell dragon's bones had him hypnotized, then slowly responded with a question of his own.

"Lucina... Do you remember what I promised you? That night when we... you know..."

"Of course," she told him, a little unsure of where he was going.

"Good..." Robin seemed relieved. "No matter what happens in there... I'll be there for you. I... I need you to promise me that you won't forget that."

"I would never forget," Lucina gave a small smile of reassurance.

"And also... promise... that you'll remind me if I forget," Robin's voice was quivering, and his eyes still never left those of the skull.

The smile on Lucina's face turned into a confused frown. "Why would you forget?" she asked softly.

Robin looked hesitant. "...Just in case," he replied and ended the conversation there, pulling on the reins of his horse to start walking again.

Lucina watched Robin slowly move away from her without another word. She urged her horse forward as well, taking care to keep her distance, as it was clear that he didn't want to talk about it. Something definitely wasn't right with him, and she only wished that she had a clue as to what it was.

"You see them too, don't you?" Robin whispered to Chrom as the Shepherds were led deeper into Plegia Castle. "Plegian soldiers. In the shadows."

"Yes... Just make sure everyone is on guard," Chrom replied without turning his head in order to maintain a regal posture as he walked.

Robin held his hands behind his back, quickly holding up the signal he had devised in case there was any trouble before dropping it. Always alert, Lon'qu caught the indication and gave a slight nod of the head to show he understood before melting into the Shepherds' ranks, casually taking up the rear while passing the signal on to the rest of the army.

"We're walking right into a trap, Father," Lucina hissed under her breath. "He lured us here so he could kill us."

"It certainly seems that way," Chrom agreed. "But we cannot show any suspicion. We need to find out where the last of the Gemstones is."

Lucina's anxiety had shifted into high gear as soon as they had entered the castle, and she had to resist the urge to tear Falchion from its hilt and leap at the Plegians who were almost surely waiting to ambush them. She took a quick glance down every corridor and into every room to make a general estimate of how many soldiers they may have to face. It wasn't very hard to search, for almost anything that cast a shadow hid a few of them and they weren't exactly being subtle.

As the escort led them around a corner and into a different hallway, Lucina peered into an ornate dining room with a table that stretched long enough to easily fit over a hundred people. At the very end of the room on the other side of the table, she thought she saw a single man out in the open standing very still and looking back at her. His cowl was pulled low and cast a shadow on his face, so she couldn't see any of his features clearly. Lucina didn't pay him much attention at first, but then stopped, as her mind comprehended what she had just seen. Wasn't that man wearing...? But Robin was right with them... Lucina glanced inside the room again to find that whoever was inside had disappeared. She had to continue moving to keep up with her father, but Lucina couldn't shake the feeling that the man had been wearing Robin's coat.

Again, she checked to make sure that the real Robin was indeed still with her father, but couldn't help noticing that he seemed stranger than he had been before. His movements were tense and he looked distracted, as if he had something else on his mind. *He must be so nervous*, Lucina thought helplessly. More than anything she wanted to go to Robin and at least hold his hand to reassure him that she was there for him, but much to her dismay their positions didn't allow it at the moment.

"Right this way, milord," their Plegian escort halted in front of two gilded doors and motioned towards the other guards to open them. "His Majesty King Validar has eagerly awaited your presence," the man growled as he stepped aside, showing the Shepherds in.

"Thank you," Chrom nodded, suspicious but showing no evidence of it.

The room that awaited them on the other side of the doors was massive enough to fit all the Shepherds comfortably with plenty of room to spare. It was filled with some of the most extravagant furniture and carpets that Lucina had ever seen, which were all shades of purple and gold. The tapestries that hung by the arched windows were breathtaking, but not because they were beautiful. Each one was emblazoned with the Mark of Grima, the six-eyed symbol that represented the fell dragon. The six eyes that invoked fear and signaled imminent death now surrounded her. Lucina shuddered at the constant reminders of her ruinous future and at the possibility that the events that led to Grima's resurrection may still come to pass in this timeline.

"Ah, what a pleasant surprise!"

The voice made her flinch, and Lucina felt the need to check behind her just in case the man it belonged to wasn't there to stab her in the back. The lanky Plegian king strode into the room from another set of doors on the opposite end with a sinister smile on his face. He was shadowed by Aversa, the sorceress who had once served under Gangrel. The man raised his long, gnarled fingers into the air as he examined his prey with satisfaction.

"Welcome to Plegia, Prince Chrom," Validar exclaimed. "I've been expecting you for far too long."

And I leave you with Robin's loving father.

Severa got some unexpected screentime in this little transition chapter, which is always good - I love writing using the diversity of all the characters from Awakening to spice the dialogue up a bit. To anybody wondering why Robin and Lucina are still keeping their relationship secret, it isn't as much as how the Shepherds would actually react and more of how Lucina *thinks* they would react. Ever since she came to the past, she's wanted to keep her alterations to the bare minimum needed to change the future. Unfortunately for our friend Lucina, she never expected that she would fall in love with her father's tactician. Her logic behind not letting her father find out is that she figures he would get angry regarding the whole "your daughter with your best friend" thing. Now we'll have to find out eventually whether or not that's actually how Chrom will see it, especially because some things can't be hidden for long...

Robin has been acting rather strangely, hasn't he? That problem will also be addressed later, so if the meaning of what he says confuses you a bit, it will make more sense soon.

I also want to say thank you for all the people who have favorited/followed/reviewed so far - it's nice to know that people enjoy reading my work! I'll keep trying to write this story to the best of my ability! Until next chapter!

Chapter 9: Traitor

In which Validar turns on the Shepherds and Robin steals something important

Chapter 9 - Traitor

"The pleasure is mine, King Validar," Chrom gave a courteous bow. "We responded to your invitation as soon as we could. My men needed a brief rest after the war."

"Ah, yes," Validar grinned. "I must congratulate the Yissean army for your impressive feat."

"You conquered the unconquerable," Aversa added. "Walhart was nothing but a delusional man in a position of power."

"I wouldn't say that," Chrom replied, slightly annoyed at the woman's understatement. "The war wasn't easy, and many brave warriors died fighting his regime. The terrible loss of life should not be forgotten."

"But did you not succeed? Sometimes sacrifices have to be made to achieve a greater goal." Aversa acted as if Chrom's remorse for the fallen was trivial.

"Not if I can help it," he declared. "If there's a way for me to save every life I can, I'll follow that path no matter how difficult it may be."

"An admirable philosophy... But we can't always get what we want, can we, milord?" the woman sneered.

Chrom narrowed his eyes, becoming visibly agitated by the conversation, and shifted the conversation back to the Plegian king before that anger could overflow into his speech. "I was told that you had something that you wanted to give us," he reminded the man bluntly.

"No time for a friendly conversation?" Validar asked in exaggerated surprise. "Your anxiousness and lack of courtesy trouble me," he hissed. "The Gemstones and the Fire Emblem can be... dangerous artifacts to say the least. Their improper usage in the past is a fact that the Grimleal are all too familiar with."

"Improper usage?" Lucina blurted out, unable to believe what the man had said. "You mean when the first exalt used them to banish the fell dragon centuries ago? How could ridding the world of that... that monster be improper?!"

"That 'monster' you speak of is the very god that we Grimleal worship here in Plegia," Validar snarled. "Other Plegians are not as... forgiving of such insults as I. I would watch my tongue if I was you, future child."

Future? But he wasn't supposed to...

"How did you know that?" Robin angrily spoke up for the first time, in sync with her thoughts. "You don't know who she is!"

"Ah, my son!" Validar cried as if he had just noticed Robin, ignoring his accusations. "You were so quiet that I wasn't aware of my own flesh and blood in the room! You really should be more mannerly in the presence of your father." The man took care to emphasize the word and make it loud enough for all the Shepherds to hear.

Robin winced and immediately recoiled as if he had been slapped in the face. The fact shamed him to no end, and the look on his face told Lucina that he wanted to pull up his cowl and hide. She could hardly believe that the two were related at all: they had practically nothing in common from their complexions to their personalities. Robin was kind and thought about the needs of others before himself, while Validar was the opposite. Still, the blood relation had worried the tactician ever since he first learned of it on Carrion Isle.

Validar seemed to be taking great pleasure in Robin's discomfort and laughed coldly before continuing. "Where have you been?" he tormented. "You belong here in Plegia. Your rightful place is by my side."

Robin's brow furrowed and he put a hand to his head, as if every word that Validar spoke was bringing him great pain. "No..." he responded weakly. "I know where I belong..."

The Plegian king rose to full height and put a hand into the folds of his cloak. "We shall see about that," he muttered quietly as he found what he was searching for. His fingers emerged from his robes, now holding a small round object that he held high into the air. The sun from the surrounding windows reflected off the stone, causing its polished black surface to gleam. "The very object I hold in my hand before you is Sable," Validar declared. "It has been under close Plegian protection for many years, and now it shall finally serve its purpose."

Lucina was in awe of the brilliant sight. There was no doubt that the object was truly the last of the five Gemstones, and the very same one that had been lost in her future. Without it, she had been unable to perform a complete Awakening ritual and receive Naga's full power. It did manage to generate enough energy to send her and her friends into the past, which was their only other option. Had they had all the Gemstones, events would have turned out very differently for her future.

Chrom looked relieved as well, fearing that Validar had lied about having it in his possession at all. "It is most gracious of you to give this to us, Your Majesty." He extended his right hand to take the stone, but the king ignored his gesture.

"It shall serve its purpose," Validar repeated. "But not the one that you pursue, Prince Chrom."

"What?" Chrom was slow to respond, relieved expression fading from his face.

"You are not welcome here, intruders!" the king snarled with sudden malevolence, placing the Gemstone back into his cloak. "You are not part of the world that he wishes to create! You must be removed from it!"

Lucina gritted her teeth, instinctively finding Falchion at her hip. "You mad scoundrel! This is a declaration of war!"

Validar held out his arm, motioning for the soldiers by the doors to block the exit. "Yisseans!" he cried. "I offer you a trade! The Fire Emblem... for your lives!"

"You wouldn't dare!" Chrom shouted, hands on his Falchion as well.

"That was not an option as much as a command," Validar growled angrily. "Give me the Emblem now!"

"...Never."

"Then we shall see if you can save every life now, Prince! Guards! Seize them! Do not let them leave this place unharmed!"

"Chrom! We have to go!" Robin snapped out of his grimace and was again on full alert.

"Shepherds!" Chrom shouted. "Fall back and cut down anyone who gets in your way! We fight for our lives!"

Immediately the Shepherds had their weapons drawn and had assumed a battle formation, using their size as a group to defend each other as the Plegian soldiers who had been concealed began to attack. Lucina pulled Falchion from its sheath, and almost would have been relieved that the tense atmosphere had been broken if not for that Validar still had the Gemstone. She looked in the man's direction again, but he had vanished into thin air along with Aversa.

"Nowi! Nah! We need you now!" Robin called out over the rising clamor.

"I hope these bullies like dragons!" Nowi grinned childishly and pulled out her dragonstone, raising it into the air above her head with Nah doing the same. In a burst of energy akin to an eruption of flower petals, two massive manaketes rose from the Shepherds' ranks.

"Together, Mother!" Nah's voice echoed, warped by her dragon form. Simultaneously, the two released streaming fireballs from their mouths at the closed door, which blew apart and burst into flames.

"Now! Go!" Chrom beckoned to the rest of the army, and together with Robin led the escape. The Shepherds began flooding out of the now open exit, striking down the onslaught of opposing soldiers. Nowi and Nah were forced to change back into their human forms, for the hallways were much too narrow for their dragon bodies.

Lucina was still desperately searching amidst the chaos of the throne room for anywhere that the Plegian king could have disappeared to. They needed the last Gemstone. Without it the future couldn't be truly changed!

"Lucina! We need to..." Robin cried from the door before pausing to counter an attack from a Plegian soldier with his Levin Sword. Shaving the man aside, he pointed the sword directly at his opponent. The sword began to crackle with magic before releasing a deadly thunderbolt from its tip, sending the other man sprawling to the ground. "We need to go now! There's no time!"

The mission was a failure, but still, retreat was never her ideal situation. She would have preferred to stay and find Validar so she could force him to hand over Sable by any means.

"Lucina!" Robin shouted again, growing impatient.

"...I'm coming!" she called back, and left the throne room behind to join the last of the Shepherds by the doorway. Robin

waited until she had joined up with them before assuming the rear of the group, frantically ensuring that everyone was still accounted for.

"Robin, I need you up here!" Chrom commanded as he cut down an enemy mage. "All of these rooms look the same! Where do we go?"

The tactician forced his way through the crowd to the front, but as he met up with Chrom he held his hands to his head in pain.

"Are you alright?" Chrom nervously asked.

"...Yes. I'm fine. We go..." Robin paused to think before continuing. "We have to go right! Then straight when the hallway forks into three!"

"You heard him! Let's go!"

Lucina tried to keep up the pace with her father and Robin, who kept blurting out convoluted directions despite his headache. She didn't remember following this same path when they had entered, but Robin must know where they were going. If he really was Validar's son, maybe he was having subconscious memories of the castle from when he was younger...

"Another right! Through the far arch!" he yelled out, to which the Shepherds dutifully obeyed.

When they finally came to the main entrance hall, even Robin looked relieved that his navigation was successful. The Plegian soldiers that stood between them and exit didn't seem natural though, as if they were in some sort of trance. As Lucina fought, she noticed that their movement was more like that of the Risen, and they seemed slower to feel pain. What she found particularly unsettling was that the men were mindlessly repeating the same phrases over and over as they fought.

"Don't leave Plegia so soon!" an axe-wielding man droned as he brought his weapon down. "Stay with us!"

Lucina slipped out of the man's reach and thrust Falchion at his side, piercing an open slit in his armor. The soldier dropped his axe and collapsed to the floor, but otherwise did not make any indication that the attack had hurt him.

"Stay... forever!" he gasped with a final breath and fell still. Even fighting the Risen was more comfortable in comparison, because Lucina knew that they were already dead. But this behavior in the living... What had happened to them?

The Shepherds were forced to assemble into defensive, compact groups and had to use superior range and speed to attack. Given the more open space, their shape-shifting allies were able to join in the chaos. Manakete fireballs joined the stream of arrows over Lucina's head and combusted on hordes of Plegians at a time, while Panne and Yarne in beast form darted around the room, striking with bone-crushing strikes from their hind legs.

Despite the hall's massive size, it was still an enclosed area, and since the two sides were so close together Lucina found herself having to avoid taking friendly fire as well as enemy attacks. If she got on the wrong end of a taguel's kick she could easily be critically injured, and it didn't help that Henry was haphazardly throwing out hexes left and right.

"Hey, I remember you from wizard school!" he flicked his wrist at another Plegian mage and hit him with a stream of dark magic. The hex drained all the moisture from the other man's skin, causing it to dry instantly and flake off. "...And now you're cursed! Nyaha!" Lucina certainly didn't want to be hit with one of those either.

Still, the enemy soldiers showed no signs of defeat. They weren't difficult to outwit, especially in their mindless state, but had strength in numbers. Plegians poured out from the surrounding hallways, stepping over their fallen comrades. They repeatedly threw themselves at the Shepherds with little regard for danger, and their recklessness enabled them to land suicidal attacks. The Shepherds didn't reasonably expect their disregard for their own lives, and were taking minor injuries as a result. If this kept up, the army would exhaust itself before they could make it out the door.

"We're almost out!" Chrom called. "Don't waste any time fighting! Head straight for the exit!"

"Chrom!" Robin's eyes widened in terror. "Something is coming! We have to leave now!" he moaned.

"Robin, what's wrong?! What's com..." her father was interrupted by a flash of light in front of him, then he shouted in pain. "Hgh..." He fell to his knees with his hand over his chest, as Validar's twisted form materialized in front of him.

"Chrom!"

"Father!"

"I will ask you nicely one last time," Validar spoke slowly, withdrawing his hand from where he had struck Chrom. "Give me the Fire Emblem!"

Lucina tried to run to her father's aid, but something was preventing her from doing so. No matter how much she pushed against it, a sort of invisible barrier pushed back with equal force. She could do nothing but watch her father's fallen form in horror.

"Never... You'll never take it from me..." Chrom groaned, unable to stand up.

Validar's lips curled into a grin at Chrom's response. "You're right," he admitted, turned his head to face Robin. "I won't take it from you... My son will!"

"What? I would never..." Robin attempted to protest before doubling over in agony. The color rapidly drained from his cheeks, and he drove his fingers into his scalp. "Get... out... of my... head..." Robin growled weakly, looking like he wanted to tear his very brain from his skull.

"Robin," Validar addressed him. "You will do as I say."

"I... I..."

"Give me the Fire Emblem."

On the command, Robin shakily rose to his feet, body shivering uncontrollably. He took a single step towards Chrom's crumpled figure, then another, then another. Lines of strain still etched their way across his face, but like the rest of the Plegian soldiers, his expression was now blank and his eyes were glossy. Removing his arms from his head, he held his hands outstretched towards Chrom, or more specifically the artifact that he possessed.

"No!" Lucina screamed helplessly. Robin flinched at her voice, momentarily halting his advance, but a sharp glare from Validar forced him to continue.

"Robin... What the hell are you doing?!" her father winced as his tactician stood over him. Not responding, Robin bent over and seized the Fire Emblem, trying to rip it from Chrom's grasp. The two struggled for control of it for a moment, but Chrom couldn't fight for long in his injured state. "N...no..." Chrom conceded in defeat as Robin pried the Emblem from his hands.

Robin hobbled over to the Plegian king holding the artifact outstretched with both arms, as if begging for him to take it. The moment it was within reach, Validar greedily swiped the Emblem with his spider-like fingers. As soon as he did so, Robin instantly collapsed to the ground, like a puppet with severed strings. Validar seemed to caress the Emblem gleefully, running his sharp fingernails over every ancient inscription on the object's surface.

"It was foretold that I was to come in possession of the Fire Emblem," he spoke absentmindedly, not directed towards anyone in particular. "His will is coming together as we speak." Lucina felt as if every word was a stab at her very soul, and her skin grew cold in fear. As if confirming her assumption, Validar then turned to eye her with the same malice he had before in the throne room, then spoke with words that turned her very bones to ice. "The future is sealed."

With his final statement, Validar vanished, disappearing in a flash of light and burst of shadowy smoke. The force that had suppressed Lucina's movement was lifted as well, but she still felt as if a huge weight rested on her chest, constricting her breathing and crushing her heart.

Chrom was already getting up with his Falchion in hand, and he was rapidly advancing on his fallen tactician. Contrary to what Lucina assumed he was going to do, her father instead held out his other hand to help Robin's dazed form to his feet.

"What... what happened?" Robin confusedly asked, to which her father answered with a soft but firm "Not now."

Chrom turned away from him and again sounded the retreat call, calling the Shepherds away from the fighting and out the exit into the scorching desert sun once more.

Despite the frenzy of the escape, Lucina had not made a sound. Even when the Plegian castle was far in the distance and the Shepherds were safe, she said nothing. She wouldn't have been able to speak even if she had wanted to.

The camp was uncharacteristically quiet as well. Everybody had found something to do while they reflected on what had

happened. Lucina had not seen the Shepherds' tactician since the event; he was probably hiding somewhere so no one would see him. She didn't care.

Lucina checked thoroughly to make sure that no one was near the training grounds, for she needed to be alone as well. She began to set up another training dummy, and her hands trembled in her work as she tried to contain herself. Slowly bringing Falchion to her face, Lucina felt her breathing quicken and the anger and pain she had held back began to rise. She glared at her target, which was humanoid in shape with a blank face. If it had eyes, Lucina was almost certain that she would have seen Robin's in them. *How could he?!*

She viciously lashed her blade out, inflicting a deep slash in her target's side. *How could he do this to me?! She attacked again, piercing the dummy's right arm and sending it flailing about.*

He... played me... for a fool! Every word was another furious sword strike. This whole time... he was throwing me off! Making me careless! Another attack. And... and to think... that he ever could have loved me! Lucina felt tears welling up in her eyes, but she refused to allow them to fall.

Why?! Why did it have to be you?! Of all the people in the world, the one I fall in love with is the one who I have sought to destroy! Her swings were slicing empty air instead of the target now as she was rapidly losing focus. Every miss that she should have hit only made her angrier. *You liar!*

A terrible solution began to form in her mind, one that just earlier had made her skin crawl and filled her with fear, but the more she thought about it, the more impossible it was to avoid. *I came here for one reason, and one reason only,* Lucina reminded herself over and over. *I must only fear failure! My conflicted feelings must not stop me!* Her sword strikes began to connect again as she crushed her doubts one by one in her mind. *I cannot allow you to stand in my way!*

With a scream of wrath, Lucina brought Falchion back then plunged it deep into the dummy's chest so that its tip protruded from the other side. She refused to move for a moment as she tried to calm her frantic breathing. Staring into the battered dummy's still blank expression, she saw Robin's eyes again and winced. She took a step back, leaving Falchion impaled in her target. Her outburst scared her. Lucina couldn't remember the last time she had felt that angry before. Even though she didn't want to admit it to herself, she felt as if the visions of her ruined future that flashed through her mind were justification for her actions enough. She shakily pulled Falchion from the target's chest and returned it to its sheath at her hip, rage now dispelled and replaced with sorrow. *I'm sorry, Robin... But you leave me no choice.*

I did promise more drama, so I hope I did not disappoint with this chapter!

Henry makes a short cameo as well - his hexes would definitely do something strange instead of just killing right then and there, because that isn't fun nyaha.

It certainly seems like Lucina's fears of falling in love are coming true aren't they? Lucina getting as angry as she does is a little uncharacteristic of her, so her outburst at the end shows how conflicted and in denial she is. Right now she's more angry at Robin for what she thinks was a "false affection" towards her rather than at his stealing of the Fire Emblem. She thinks he betrayed her, so she's broken-hearted... Poor Lucina. We'll have to see Robin's opinion of these assumptions soon. Robin flinching under Validar's spell at the sound of Lucina's voice is important, so be sure to keep that in the back of your mind for the coming chapters.

What do you think - worth the build-up from last chapter? Ready for the confrontation scene now? Be sure to leave a review of what you think - I love getting your feedback, especially now as the story heats up!

Chapter 10: Life Means Death, Death Means Life

Long chapter, anyone? The confrontation, or Lucina's judgement, is probably the most intimate scene between Robin and Lucina in game, and it's especially significant if Lucina is married to Robin (she isn't in this story now, but they're technically dating I guess so its a similar scenario). I wanted to make this chapter nice and lengthy because of how important it is to their relationship. Also because writing emotional and intense dialogue between these two is my second favorite thing after writing fluffy dialogue between these two. I'm sorry to say that you aren't getting any fluff this chapter though. Try listening to the music that plays during this scene *Id (Sorrow)* to get in the mood. Prepare yourself.

In which Lucina confronts Robin and must choose between love or hate

Chapter 10 - Life Means Death, Death Means Life

Over the next few days, Lucina took special care to monitor Robin's actions just in case he was tried to attempt anything else while morale was low. It wasn't difficult to do; he very rarely wandered from his tent after what happened in Plegia. He only really left to go on short walks or grab meals, which he took back to his tent to eat anyways. Like he had done to her in Valm, Robin was doing a masterful job at avoiding people when he didn't want to be seen. Lucina didn't think that she had heard him speak to anyone else either, even when he was forced to be with the rest of the Shepherds as they marched out of the desert. This evening, they had set up camp in the forested plains that separated Plegia from Ylisse.

Lucina had been planning her course of action since Robin stole the Fire Emblem from Chrom, and now all she needed was to get Robin alone. No one could see what she had to do, especially Chrom. As much as she didn't like having to constantly keep her father in the dark, she knew that he wouldn't be able to understand the necessity of her action and that his insistent trust in Robin would make him try to stop her. *He wasn't there. He hasn't stared into the embodiment of death's six gleaming eyes and watched it slaughter all those dear to you.*

The moment presented itself to her when Robin left his tent around dinnertime. Instead of heading in his usual direction to the mess hall, he began to walk the other way towards the outskirts of camp. Lucina traced his steps from afar, making sure that he wouldn't be able to hear her approach until it was too late. As Robin made his way into a small grove of trees that surrounded camp, she stopped walking in a sudden outburst of self-disgust. Is this what she had fallen to? Nothing more than a beast stalking its helpless prey? This was murder. Murder that she felt was justified by the millions of lives that could be saved, but still murder nonetheless. He hadn't killed Chrom yet, but did the possible risk of him doing so justify her need for Robin to die? Was any murder justifiable? Was what she was about to do any different from what Robin was going to do? Might do? She started to doubt herself, which she had hoped wouldn't happen. She forced herself to push any doubts away. Lucina was accustomed to this by now, and she locked these uncertainties away in her mental vault along with all her other fears and desires; the vault had to be almost full by now. Repeating the goals of her mission over once more in her head, she hurried to catch up behind Robin.

On the other side of the trees, she emerged into a small clearing. It was thick with amber grasses that grew up to her knees. Taking a brief glance over her surroundings, she found Robin on the other side of the field, standing over a fallen log with his back towards her. He brushed away a few fallen leaves with gentle sweeps from his hand before sitting down. Even though the trunk was propped up and rested above the ground, the tactician's long coat still scraped the earth, becoming damp with the dewdrops that clung to the grass. He let out an exhausted breath and his tense shoulders began to fall as he slowly relaxed them. Hands folded in his lap, Robin stared deep into the trees and challenged the forest to match his silence. The two were at odds for a few moments until the forest yielded to his gaze with a light breeze that caused the leaves to rustle softly. The man however did not seem proud of his victory; he only responded by reaching into his coat and pulling out a plain-looking book as well as a small inkwell and quill.

He placed the inkwell down next to him, ensuring that the log was flat enough so that the bottle wouldn't slip off before uncapping it, then he opened the book about three quarters of the way through to a blank page. Dabbing the tip of his quill into the inkwell, Robin started to write. After putting only a few words down he hesitated, quill tip hovering over the page as he read the letters over in his head. Lucina was far too distant to see what he had written, but before she could make an assumption Robin struck a definitive line through the words and started over. Again he paused after a sentence or two, and he shook his head sadly as the words suffered the same fate as those that had been written before.

Lucina watched the cycle repeat a few more times, every one of his attempts eventually becoming as short as one word before it got crossed out as he got frustrated. She wasn't able to wait until he finished his seemingly hopeless endeavor, so taking a deep breath to mentally prepare herself for what she was about to do, she began to walk towards him. Lucina did not have to be concerned with remaining stealthy now, and she allowed her footsteps to fall harder than before. Robin's head rose as soon as he became aware of her approach, and quickly he fastened the cap onto his

inkwell and tucked all three of his items back into his coat. His body stiffened in apprehension as he stood, but he did not turn around. Lucina halted when she was a few yards away from him, and for a moment her eye caught the tea stain on his coat that she had caused before she focused herself once more.

"Robin," Lucina finally spoke, breaking the uneasy silence.

The man cringed at the name, as if its meaning appalled him, but he immediately recognized the voice who had spoken it. "Lucina..." His whisper of a response was weak and tinged with slight fear.

"...We need to talk."

The tactician could tell from her tone that she hadn't followed him all the way out into the forest out for an idle conversation, and he slowly turned around to see her. "Listen, about what happened in Plegia... Gods..." He scratched the back of his head and looked down into the grass. "It's... so hard to me to put into words, but I can try as best I can for you."

"You don't have to, Robin. I know what I saw," Lucina spoke in a steely voice. She hated how pathetic he was making himself look; it was like she was scolding a small, helpless child, and now she was starting to feel bad for him. *I'm too soft! I can't let these feelings get the better of me!* "Save your sorry faces. They won't work on me anymore."

"What do you mean?" Robin asked confusedly, but Lucina refused to play this game with him any longer and changed the subject.

"Robin..." she began, averting her gaze and looking up into the sky, which was soaked in vivid reds and oranges as it approached the final stages of sunset. "What do you think about my father?"

"Chrom? We've been through a lot together - my whole life that I can remember. We've fought side by side in countless battles, and I'm glad that he was the one who found me in that field." Robin thought out loud.

"My father is kind and caring, and despite being in this war he desires nothing but peace to come from it. At least, that was what I thought of him as a child," Lucina reminisced on the few memories she had of Chrom in her timeline. "When I made the decision to come to the past to save this world's future, I had the slight fear that those qualities were exaggerated. That I only saw the good in my father at my naive age and he actually wasn't as great as I thought he was."

She paused and broke away from the vivid sky, making eye contact with Robin again. "I was happy to find that those fears were wrong. Now that I have the privilege of speaking to him at my older age, I realized that he was a more kind and considerate person than I had ever imagined." Despite the anger she felt for Robin at the moment, Lucina managed a small smile. "I know even more so now that if he dies, the world will be robbed of a noble man."

"Yes, Chrom is a great man, and a greater friend," Robin agreed, then adopted a more somber tone. "I keep telling you this, but still I can't imagine how it must have felt to lose him. It must have been impossibly hard for you..."

Lucina gritted her teeth at the mention of her feelings. "Which brings me to why I'm here," she told him, attempting to remain stoic but found that her anger was beginning to boil over her calm exterior. "Do you know the real reason that I have trouble with trusting who should be my closest allies? I haven't told anyone about this, not even my father yet, but it is because whoever killed my father was one of the Shepherds."

Robin's eyes widened in revelation. "So that's why you felt the need to protect Chrom in Valm. You thought that Donnel could have been the one who allowed him to die..." He put a hand to his chin as he thought, then blurted out, "But who would try to kill Chrom? All of us here would protect him with our lives, not leave him to die!"

"That's what I believed as well when I was young," Lucina informed. "The Shepherds were all heroes to me. I even used to pretend I was the leader of my very own junior Shepherds with Cynthia and Owain. But my faith in them was forever tarnished when I learned that my father was killed, betrayed by one of his closest friends."

She paused to see if Robin had anything to add, but was quiet and willed her to continue. "I feared of growing too close to any one of them when I came here. When I discovered my father's killer-to-be, I didn't want to feel too attached to whoever it was, so I would not hesitate when I had to take action. I realize now that despite my best efforts I failed in this desire, because in light of recent events I have all the reason to believe that my father's murderer..." She took Falchion's hilt and slowly drew it from its sheath, but kept it at her side. "Is you, Robin."

"What? That's insane!" Robin cried after her accusation registered in his mind. "I would never think, not even dream of hurting Chrom!"

"Then what happened in Plegia?" Lucina began to raise her voice, gradually allowing her rage to surface. "Why did you

so willingly heed Validar's command to steal the Fire Emblem from my father?"

"Lucina, that wasn't my choice to make!"

"You thought you were clever," Lucina interrupted him with a low growl. "You knew that I would stop you, so you tried to throw me off! Distract me with your false affections while you slipped past my defenses to get to my father!" Her right hand tightened around her sword's hilt, and the other curled into a fist. She glared at him with eyes full of rage, but her voice was desperate. "Did our love truly mean nothing to you?!"

"No! That isn't true at all! My love for you!"

"Is a lie!" Lucina cried out, again refusing to allow her tears to fall. "All those times you said that I was special to you, and that you cared for me... All lies!" Her voice fell softer. "It wasn't just enough to evade me so you could try to kill my father, was it? You knew I was broken and you had to break me some more..."

"Lucina!" Robin tried to speak. "Stop saying these terrible things! It was never my intention to kill Chrom! I would never try to hurt you!"

"I knew I never should have fallen in love with anybody in the first place, even if it was real," Lucina ignored him. "When my mission is complete, I have to return to my future to help rebuild my world. I...I don't belong here, and neither does my affection. Whatever love I had died with the millions of people who lost their lives to Grima." She held Falchion in a battle stance, tip pointed at Robin's chest. "I apologize, Robin, but I must kill you here before I allow you to cause the destruction I've witnessed!"

"Lucina, you don't have to do this..."

"Draw your weapon!" she commanded. "My pride prevents me from striking down an unarmed opponent. I promise your death will be swift and painless."

Robin stood very still with his expression a mixture of sadness and guilt. He simply stared at Lucina for a long time, then gave a soft sigh and reached down his hand to grab the Levin Sword that was strapped to his hip. The magical sword began to give off a faint glow in response to his touch and gradually came to life with electricity. Robin held the sword in his own fighting stance, but he did not attempt to initiate a duel.

"Lucina," he spoke in a quiet voice. "You don't have to believe me if you don't want to, but I need to tell you that nothing I said to you was a lie, and the love I felt and still feel for you is true. I need you to know that." He raised his Levin Sword high into the air, but instead of attacking he threw the sword to the ground. The weapon made a dull thud as it collided with the earth and crackled faintly as its energy died in intensity.

Lucina winced as she watched his action. She didn't want him to do this. "No... Why did you drop your sword? Pick it up and fight for your life..." she begged.

"You disarmed me," he reasoned. "I don't want to fight you, Lucina, and I would never do anything to try and hurt you. I'm sorry if you felt like I was trying to. I made you a promise, and in that promise I said that I would do anything to make you happy. If killing me will make you happy, if it will finally put your mind at ease and you won't have to fear losing your father anymore, then... so be it. My life is yours, Lucina. It always has been."

"Don't you see?" she asked him frantically. "This isn't going to make me happy! I don't want to have to do this, but I have no other choice! If what you're saying is true... and you knew that your actions could be influenced, then why didn't you tell us? We could have kept you away from Validar and none of this would have happened!"

"I didn't fully recognize how powerful he was, and that he could warp my mind to change my very thoughts..." he tried to explain.

"B...but even if it wasn't your fault, you have to understand that you're still dangerous! If Validar can control you, then what's to stop him from forcing you to kill my father? To kill all of us? Only one of you can live, and that person has to be my father." Lucina's anger was losing its foundations, and it was crumbling away to her true feelings for him. "Please, Robin... I can't let you become your father's living weapon. It's the only way!"

"...You're right," Robin agreed sadly.

"What...no! You aren't supposed to agree with me! You... you can't be so willing to accept death!"

"I want to die while I still remember the kind of person who I used to be. I began my new life as a Shepherd, and if I could choose, I want it to end as a Shepherd, not as a slave. If my father wants to turn me into a weapon, we can't give him that

chance, can we?" The corners of his mouth rose upward slightly, and Lucina had no doubt that this smile was genuine. "I know that what you're doing is for the good of everyone."

"It's not for the good of you though..."

"You're right that your father is much more important than I am." Robin let out a defeated laugh, as if he found his lack of worth almost amusing. "I thought I knew who I was for a while, but in truth I have no idea. Now that I think about it really, I'm just a nobody that Chrom found lying around in an empty field."

"But you're important to me..."

"I guess you're right about what you said earlier too." It was Robin now who was ignoring her protests. "That I shouldn't have tried to get you involved more than you had to in the past. It...it would have never worked out, and I let my desires get the better of me. You'll have to go back to your future once this war is over, and you couldn't possibly bring anybody from this time with you. I was... just setting you up for heartbreak since the beginning... I'm sorry..."

Robin began to take a few steps towards her, leaving his sword behind. "If you could just promise me one more thing before I die," he asked. "Please, when everything is over, and when you go back to your time, find someone else who loves you. Anybody. I don't care who as long as whoever he is makes you happy and keeps you company." Robin looked away from her for a moment. "Because feeling alone, and not feeling like you belong, is such a... terribly sad feeling, and you mustn't have to suffer that any longer. That's all I want."

"D...don't look at me like that! Don't make this harder for me then it already is!" Lucina stammered.

"I'm sorry," Robin apologized again and continued to walk towards her until he was only a few feet away. "Do what you must. I'm ready now." He held both his hands outstretched with palms facing towards her.

"I'm not though..." she responded weakly.

"Lucina, the time to change your fate is now," Robin's voice was gentle but decisive. "You can finally have the life that you've always wanted to live. I would gladly give my own life for Chrom, and for all of the Shepherds, and for you."

"I... Ah gods... Why?" Lucina was choking on her own words. Robin was still walking towards her, and he was within attacking range now. All it would take was one stab through his chest to end the life that he was so willingly giving up to her. She looked down at the Falchion that her shaking hands still held pointed at him. The teardrop-shaped hole in its hilt had begun to glow a faint blue, like it had on the night when she had prevented Emmeryn's assassination. The light signified that the future was about to be changed, but she didn't want it to have to change like this. Was she about to allow her exalted blade to become a sacrificial dagger?

Lucina brought the weapon closer to her as to prepare for a strike, keeping the point of the sword still trained on the man in front of her. Robin stopped advancing and stood still, then closed his auburn eyes and waited. When she saw him like this... Her own eyes began to water. She was too weak.

"I... I can't..." she whispered, both to him and to herself.

Robin's eyes suddenly opened wide in fear, and as if it was angered by Robin's presence, the Falchion began to glow fiercely. Before she had time to comprehend its reaction, a mental sword buried itself into her head and her brain erupted with a headache that made her skull throb and her pulse rapidly quicken in shock. Dropping Falchion, she let out a brief gasp of pain and sunk to her knees as she clutched her head. She felt like a million shadowy hands had all at once invaded her mind and now were ripping her brain to pieces.

"Lucina!" Robin cried out and tried to rush to her side. As he approached, the ringing in her ears grew louder and the pain intensified, making her let out an agonized scream as she covered her face with her hands. Robin immediately withdrew his hands as if he had burned them and he took a few steps backwards, causing the sharper pain in her head to weaken again. He helplessly watched her crippled form in fear and continued to back away, and with every step he took Lucina's headache became more and more bearable.

"I didn't... How did I..." Robin gasped and held his bare palms up for him to see, as if he expected to find blood on them.

Lucina raised her head to gaze up at him. The sharp pain from a moment ago forced the tears she had held back out of her eyes, which were now running down her cheeks.

"I... I hurt you..." Robin whispered in horror. "A...and I just promised you I wouldn't..." His bottom lip was quivering, and slowly he grasped fistfuls of his silvery white hair. "...I am a monster..."

He nervously looked from side to side like he was surrounded by a menacing force, then he turned his back on her and ran as fast as he could manage back in the direction of camp. Lucina weakly held out her hand as if he was still close enough for her to grab on to, but his shadow had already disappeared from the clearing and the sounds of his feet brushing against the long grass was fading quickly. She didn't have the strength to keep her arm raised and dropped it in defeat. Even though her headache was gone, the shame of what she had just attempted was not. Lucina grasped her hands around her legs and gently rested her forehead into her knees in a fetal position. The grass hugged and concealed her from the rest of the world, and the drops of dew reflected the light of the falling sun.

Lucina gave up trying to remain in bed when first light shone through the canvas walls of her tent; she hadn't slept at all last night and had been lying with her eyes closed but mind awake for hours. She had seen the same event repeated over and over behind her eyelids, as if she couldn't feel guilty enough after first experiencing it. She withdrew her hands from beneath her blanket and pressed her forefingers to her temples, letting out a low groan. What had she done?

Exhaustedly crawling out of bed, she swapped her nightclothes for her usual attire. She had lazily thrown her outfit into a crumpled pile when she arrived back at her tent last night and it was still slightly damp since it hadn't been hung up to dry, but wet clothes were the least of her worries at the moment. What if Robin had told Chrom what had happened when he ran back to camp? She didn't want her father to learn of what she had tried to do, but if he already knew anyways Lucina didn't want to lie to his face about it if he asked. Slipping into both her boots, she left the solitude of her own tent to find the one that her parents shared.

Upon arriving outside, Lucina thought she could hear her father muttering something, but it was so low she couldn't make it out. She waited for a response from Sumia, but it didn't come. She remembered that her mother usually got up early with Cynthia to tend to their pegasi, so she probably wasn't inside. Her father must be talking to himself then.

"Father?" she called inside gently. "May I come in?"

"Oh, Lucina!" Chrom's voice sounded surprised from her appearance, but it was at least a good sign that he didn't sound angry to hear from her. Hopefully Robin wouldn't tell anyone that she had tried to kill him if he hadn't told her father. "Come in," he called, and Lucina slipped inside the tent flap to find Chrom sitting at his little desk and scrutinizing a piece of paper that he was holding. He muttered a "damn it" under his breath to himself again, then addressed her without looking up. "I suppose that you should know about this too."

"Know about what, Father? What's wrong?"

"It's Robin," he sighed after a brief silence. "He's gone."

"Gone?!" Lucina exclaimed, skin growing cold at the mention of the word. "What do you mean gone? Gone where?"

"I don't know. Sumia woke me up this morning to tell me that she had found this letter from him right where you're standing. He must have slipped it through the tent flap last night while I was asleep."

"Can I see it?" Lucina asked urgently, trying but failing miserably to mask her dread over what it would say.

"Here," her father held out the piece of paper to her, which she took delicately. "He mentions you at the end, but I can't make odds or ends of why he chose to put that in there."

"He does?"

If she had just wanted to read the letter moments before, she was dying to see what he had to say about her now. The paper she held had a neat crease from where it had been folded in half, and one edge was rough and uneven. *He must have torn the page out of a book*, she surmised as she began to read. In elegant but shaky handwriting, the letter said:

Chrom,

I know you probably won't agree with my choice, but after much deliberation on my part I have decided that it is in everyone's best interest for me to leave for the time being. Regarding recent events, I realize that my actions were despicable and give you my sincerest apologies. I still don't know the extent to which my father can manipulate me, and I don't want to take the risk of staying here with you and the Shepherds if he can force me to do anyone harm. My headaches have become more frequent and painful ever since we left Plegia, so I can only surmise that he is trying to obtain a tighter grasp over my mind. Once again, I apologize for leaving you so suddenly, but I feared that if I told you in person you would try and convince me to stay. If I think of any way to get the Fire Emblem back from him, I'll find you and let you know immediately, but I cannot put you or anyone else at risk in the meantime. I'm sure you can manage without me for a little while. I can't do much good for anyone now. I hope that we can meet again someday soon when this awful

war is finally over.

Your friend,

Robin

P.S. – Don't forget to make Lucina eat her meals. I know that she doesn't like being around everybody all the time, but she needs the energy.

That was it. Robin was gone, and it was all her fault. He wouldn't have left if she hadn't confronted him last night!

"I should have known that he would do something rash," Chrom spoke as Lucina lifted her eyes off the paper. "I knew that he felt guilty for what he did no matter how many times I told him not to be. I should have tried harder to convince him that it wasn't his fault."

Lucina couldn't respond to what her father had said. She was desperately trying to figure out what Robin had meant at the end of his letter. It just seemed so out of place... It had to mean something else, but what?

In sync with her thoughts, her father asked her about the postscript of the letter. "Any idea what he meant by the end?" Lucina shook her head no, to which Chrom responded with a sad laugh. "I guess he was still just looking out for everyone even after what happened. Always doing what's best." He shook his head and spoke more to himself rather than to her. "What are we going to do without our tactician? I should have known..."

Looking out for everyone... Of course! Lucina made the connection. He must have anticipated that she would see the letter sometime or another, so the message was definitely meant for her alone and not for Chrom. He must be referring to the night that he was looking out for her best interests and had brought her dinner. It made sense!

Lucina immediately shoved the paper back at her father and started to leave. "Sorry Father but I just remembered that I have to be somewhere!" she excused as she darted out the tent flap.

"Oh... Um, okay then."

She broke into a run towards the training grounds before her father could ask her anything else. Lucina wasn't sure if there was anything waiting for her there, or if Robin's words really were in reality a friendly reminder to stay healthy, but she had to know. She burst into the armory tent, not caring if anyone else saw her so desperate. However, like she expected, her distant hope was crushed when she found that Robin was not there waiting for her to decipher his message so that when she arrived he could embrace her and tell her that everything was going to be okay. She realized that there was little hope for her at all that he even still loved her after she tried to murder him for something that he didn't do.

Despondent, Lucina sadly turned to leave when her eye caught a folded piece of paper on a weapons crate. The paper was small enough to be easily missed if one wasn't looking for it. Slowly she walked over and picked up the paper, holding it in front of her with both eagerness and hesitation. She knew that she wouldn't be able to bear not reading it, and taking a deep breath she began to unfold the creases. This paper also had a rough edge, so he must have ripped it from the same book. Lucina took one look at the top of the page and then quickly folded it up again. The first word was her name written in the same handwriting as Chrom's letter.

She clutched the note close to her chest as she ran out of the armory as quickly as she had run in, this time to her own tent. She didn't want anyone to walk in unexpectedly to see her reaction. Upon arrival, she sat down at the foot of her bed and reopened the folded edges of the letter so she could read. The words were even shakier than on Chrom's letter, and there were a few ink blotches from where his hand must have slipped while writing.

Lucina,

Gods, I don't know where to begin. I hope that you find this sooner than later, because I don't want you to feel bad for what you tried to do. I know how much it means to you to keep your father safe and to prevent your future from happening again, so I won't have you worry about not succeeding anymore. If my father turned me against you I would never be able to live with myself, and I don't want to take that chance. Every day that goes by I find it increasingly difficult to determine what is real and what the voices in my head that the headaches bring say is true. I don't know how you got one of my headaches last night, but please understand that it was never my intention to hurt you and I apologize with the bottom of my heart. I know that I'm a monster, but as of now my deepest wish is that maybe someday you could forgive me for what I have done. You may be long gone to a time and place that I'll never be able to reach before I have the chance to see you again, but if that's the case I'll feel better knowing that you aren't mad at me wherever you go. Please don't be scared anymore. You're the strongest person I know and the strongest person I'll ever meet.

Robin

Lucina had to reread the letter when she finished, tracing over every word with her finger to make sure that she was reading every sentence correctly. Out of all the emotions that she felt in reading Robin's letter, she found herself again growing angry, not towards him but towards herself.

"I'm... the monster," she whispered out loud, then began speaking as if Robin was right next to her. "It wasn't your fault! None of this was your fault and I was too blinded by my assumptions to see that!" She placed her finger over where Robin mentioned Validar. "He did this! He did this, not you!" she cried out, then became aware that someone may hear her from outside and lowered her voice. "I should be the one asking for forgiveness..." Lucina clutched the letter tightly and hung her head low into the page. "I'm sorry..." she whimpered, and she didn't move for a long time.

...Wow. I hope you didn't drown in the sea of feels after reading this chapter.

I tried to change up the confrontation scene a bit because I wanted it to seem more unique to this story, and I felt that now more than ever with the tension between Robin and Lucina that this would be the optimal time to deviate slightly from the game's plotline. I hope I conveyed their feelings for each other in their dialogue well enough! If the title was a bit confusing, I was going for a summary of Lucina's beliefs at the beginning of the chapter - if Robin lives, then he'll bring death to her father; if he dies, it should ideally save millions of lives.

Now I'm sure that you're probably wondering how Lucina got one of Robin's headaches, so I'll try to explain my reasoning. As you could guess, it wasn't Robin himself who caused it. Also, take note that the Falchion is imbued with Naga's power. In the simplest terms, Grima's power inside Robin and Naga's power inside the Falchion were reacting to each other. Grima's heart is linked to Robin's, and therefore the fell dragon could sense that Robin was in danger of Naga's power. Essentially, Grima attacked Lucina to protect Robin, even though at that point Lucina wasn't about to hurt him anyway. Now I know it seems odd at first that Grima was trying to *protect* someone else, but in reality he was protecting himself, or his avatar, until he could assume total control over Robin. Grima isn't linked to Lucina though, so he had to assault her mind through Robin. However, Grima can only attack someone else from a very short range. This is why Lucina's headache decreases in intensity when Robin steps away from her. Grima is still too weak to affect anyone else from farther than a few feet. I also wrote that the Falchion began glowing intensely right as Robin opened his eyes and realized something terrible was coming. This was basically a warning to Lucina by Naga of the imminent attack by Grima. Whew, I hope that all those personal interpretations made relative sense... I'm a big fan of elaborate headcanons, theories, and the like. Send me a quick question if it was confusing and you care for more clarification.

Also, the only reason that Robin doesn't give Lucina his letter directly to her tent was that I wanted her to find his one to Chrom first. Kind of to show that Lucina still does care for him deeply because of how eager she is to decipher his message and find his note.

But do you think now that we've lost our male protagonist for the time being that the story is going to end and leave you on such a somber note? This is the perfect time to introduce a new important character in a few chapters! But who would this character be you ask? Gosh, I don't know. The Shepherds need a new tactician... Someone with Robin's skill... I wonder where they'll find someone like that? *wink wink*

Chapter 11: Lost

In which the Shepherds determine the next course of action and Lucina takes some advice

Chapter 11 – Lost

"Did you find him?"

"I'm afraid not, milord."

Lucina pretended to become suddenly interested in the ground so her father wouldn't catch the look of utter disappointment etch its way across her face. Frederick had gone out on search missions for Robin three times today; each time the knight had come back, Lucina had held on to the desperate hope that he would bring their tactician with him. Despite the world's attempts to extinguish it, her small flame of hope kept on burning.

Chrom grunted and crossed his arms in frustration. "Did you find out anything about him then? Where he's going?"

"I visited three nearby villages and questioned some of the kind folk that live there, but not a single one said that they had seen or heard of a man meeting Robin's description," Frederick replied. "Do you think that perchance my verbal description was lacking?" he thought out loud. "Perhaps I should provide a portrait of Robin for greater clarity."

"I don't think that will be necessary, Frederick..."

The man didn't seem to hear him, and his brow furrowed as if he had just received explanation for his failed searches. "...Forgive me, milord. I realize now that since I still have yet to find Robin, I must not be searching hard enough; I promise to double my efforts from this very moment." He began to fasten on his shoulder plates as he spoke. "I will set out for another mission immediately."

"No, Frederick. It's me who should be giving you the apology," Chrom sighed. "I've been so desperate to bring him back that I didn't realize I was working you too hard, and you deserve a break for today."

"I assure you, milord, I can handle this workload easily," Frederick's eyes sharpened, eager to prove his ability. "You've been quite stressed after since Robin left, and if I allow milord to worry due to my failures, then I have failed as a knight of the halidom!"

"I admire your determination," Chrom gave a small smile. "But it's getting late, and you've already went out on three searches today." The false smile fell away to reveal his crestfallen realization. "As much as I hate to admit it, I'm not sure if we'll be able to find him at this rate. Robin knew that I would try to find him if he left, so he's probably trying to get as far away from us as he can. We just can't move this whole army as fast as one man!" He kicked his boot in the dirt and threw up his arms in annoyance. "If I didn't have to stay here to watch over the Shepherds, I'd head out there right now and haul his stupid arse back to camp myself if I had to!"

Chrom made a childish pout and stood in angry silence for a moment, as if he was waiting for someone to tell him that he didn't have any other responsibilities to attend to so he could track down his friend. "I still don't understand why he felt like we wouldn't accept him after what he did. It wasn't his fault and everyone knew that!"

Everyone except me, Lucina was again reminded of her mistake. As much as she wanted to take the blame and explain to her father that she was the one who drove him away, she knew that then her father would start questioning her as to why, and that would definitely cause her to break down. She kept silent.

"Do you honestly believe that he stole the Emblem on the purpose?" Chrom asked Frederick, desperately searching for affirmance of his statement even though he already knew the answer.

"My suspicion that he held ill intentions towards us vanished long ago, milord. Robin is a good man. One would have to be blind to not notice it."

It was like the two men were reprimanding her for her poor judgment without addressing her directly. Lucina didn't want to be constantly reminded of facts that she already knew, but felt like she deserved it nonetheless.

"My thoughts exactly." Her father was satisfied with Frederick's response. Chrom made a fantastic leader, but if there was one thing that he despised to no end, it was when his other responsibilities held him back from doing what he wanted. He didn't like it when his position dictated what he could and couldn't do.

"...Anything about Validar then? Do we know what he's planning to do?" her father reluctantly turned away from the subject of Robin for a moment to concentrate on the other major issue at hand.

Frederick bowed his head. "I fear that I have failed you again, milord. I have yet to uncover any information on the Plegian monarch's movements or intentions."

"Damn... Without the Fire Emblem we have nothing over him..."

"However, I did pick up on a small bit of knowledge from some of the elder townsfolk. Well, more of a rumor..." The knight looked ashamed again that he wasn't able to provide anything that was a confirmed fact.

"About?" Chrom was curious and motioned for him to continue.

Frederick regained his confident demeanor and spoke more surely. "The legend referred to an artifact called Naga's Tear, milord. The people say that it contains a portion of power from the Divine Dragon herself and that it has the ability to revitalize and strengthen an entire army. Assuming that it does exist and that these rumors are true, if it contains even a fraction of Naga's power..."

"Then we would at least have something..." Chrom completed Frederick's thought and put his hand to his chin. "Do you at least know where it could be?"

"Yes," the man looked relieved that he could finally address one of Chrom's questions directly. "They say it lies in an abandoned shrine to Naga called the Ruins of Time. If the villagers' sources are correct, then it should not be too far from here: maybe a day's march at most."

"Hmm, we don't have any other plans of action at the moment..." Chrom reasoned, then gave his verdict. "Rally some of the Shepherds. Tell them we leave for the Ruins of Time tomorrow."

"Right away, milord," Frederick bowed and immediately set to work.

Chrom turned away from the knight's retreating form and caught Lucina out the corner of his eye. "Oh, Lucina! You were so quiet I forgot that you were with us!" He smiled but soon recognized that it wasn't helping to improve her somber mood. "What's the matter, Lucina?" he asked in concern, becoming more serious. "You haven't been yourself recently."

"...Oh, I'm fine," Lucina was slow to notice that he was talking to her.

"Don't lie to me, young lady," Chrom put his hands on his hips in mock anger, but Lucina could tell he was exaggerating from his tone. "I'm your father, and I can tell that something definitely isn't fine."

If he starts questioning me now...

"Um..." she looked around nervously, then feigned a yawn. "I guess... I'm just really tired. I didn't feel rested this morning."

Chrom rolled his eyes, like he knew the problem all along. "Honestly, Lucina. How many times do I have to tell you to ease up on your training every once in a while and rejuvenate yourself? You were probably up too late last night practicing your swordplay again."

"Yes, that must have been it," Lucina agreed, even though the statement was completely false. She hadn't even touched Falchion since she had tried to kill Robin with it, and, while she had stayed up all night, she had been thinking over what had happened. Last night she had gone through a whole speech of how she would apologize to him if he did come back, but nothing she came up with felt right.

"No training tonight. Father's orders," Chrom commanded as he clapped his hand on her shoulder. "You'll have plenty of time for that once we reach the ruins. I need you to keep your strength up, okay?"

"I will."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"Good," her father grinned, taking a few steps backward. "Now if you'll excuse me, I should go and help Frederick prepare for the march. Goodbye, Lucina."

"Bye, Father," Lucina gave a quick wave and fled in the opposite direction. She waited until he was out of earshot before she let out the breath she had been holding. *That was too close. I have to be more careful about not letting other people*

know what I'm feeling... She looked over her shoulder as a precautionary measure just in case her father wasn't following behind her, but in doing so wasn't paying attention to where she was walking and managed to bump into her mother.

"Ah! I'm sorry, Mother!" Lucina cried in embarrassment, catching Sumia's arm before she fell flat on her face.

"Don't worry about me, Lucina," her mother gave a warm laugh. "I'm used to falling over things." She brushed herself off before continuing. "How are you, love? I'm sorry I don't get to see you too often. For someone so... independent, your sister certainly requires a lot of attention."

"Right," Lucina frowned and looked into the distance, focusing on nothing in particular except her thoughts.

Sumia was silent for a moment, studying her facial expression. "Okay, what's wrong? I can tell you have something else on your mind."

I just told myself I would be more careful...

"No, I'm fine. I'm just tired," she tried to use the same excuse she had for her father, faking another yawn.

"I have a little thing called a mother's intuition, Lucina. You'll need to try harder than that to fool me."

"Really, I am!" Lucina tried to argue. "Ask Father. He understands."

"Your father is about as good at reading people as he is at riding a pegasus," Sumia laughed again.

"Father knows how to ride a pegasus?"

"Not at all. That's what I meant: he's terrible at both," her mother explained. "So remind me again what you *should* be telling me."

"I...I'm okay."

"Lucina..."

Something was telling her that she wouldn't be able to get around her mother so easily. For someone who gave the impression that she was somewhat scatterbrained, Sumia could be remarkably aware and confident.

...Could she tell her mother? Lucina was ashamed that she had completely forgotten about her mother being an option for someone else to tell. Sumia was one of the very few people that she would trust with something as important as this, and she would understand, but would she let the secret leak to Chrom? Taking one look at her mother's expectant face, Lucina wasn't sure if she had an option anymore. She was a terrible liar.

"M...Mother? Could we speak somewhere... a little more private? Please? This... this is important..."

Sumia could tell that her daughter was being truthful, and she immediately complied with an equally serious tone. "Of course. Is it okay if we go to your tent?"

"Y...yes."

The entire walk to Lucina's tent was completely silent. Lucina tried to go over in her mind how she could possibly try to present her problem without becoming emotional, and Sumia nervously eyed her every few seconds to make sure that she was alright. When they finally arrived, Sumia fastened the tent flap from the inside and had Lucina sit down with her on the bed.

"What's the matter, dear?"

Lucina was hesitant, but decided to heed the rest of Severa's advice and go through with telling someone else. "Mother, it's just that... recently... I realized that... I mean, I'm... I thought... This is hard for me to explain..."

"That's okay," her mother kept her voice very soft and soothing. "Take your time. And just remember that I'm your mother. You can tell me anything. Whatever is bothering you."

Lucina took a deep breath. "Okay," she agreed timidly. "Just... please don't tell Father. I'm not ready to tell him. Not yet."

To her relief, Sumia put a single finger up to her mouth. "My lips are sealed."

Lucina tried again. "Recently... I realized that there was someone... very important to me. Someone who I... hold very dear to my heart." She squeezed her eyes shut and waited for the gasp of shock, but it didn't come.

Sumia did look rather surprised, but didn't look angry or start asking her a hundred questions a minute like Lucina had expected. Instead, her mother remained quiet until she felt more confident that her daughter was comfortable, and then only asked her one thing.

"Is... is it alright if I asked you who?" she spoke slowly, then added, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"It's... it's..." Lucina's voice was weak. Even though her initial was to keep her mouth shut, she knew that it would make her feel better if someone knew everything. "It's... Robin."

If Sumia was surprised again by what Lucina had said, she made a great effort not to show it. She again gave her the time she needed, but once Lucina had finally let it out that she had feelings for Robin, it was like the lock to her mental vault had been opened and her emotions were now flooding back to her all at once. She had to tell her mother everything.

"...then we ate together..."

"...I was the one who spilled tea on his coat..."

"...when I woke up in the medical tent he was watching over me to make sure I was okay..."

Lucina couldn't help herself. At least Sumia wasn't asking any questions. She considered not telling her mother about what had happened after the Valmese war, but she knew that it was important for her to know.

"...he brought me flowers and... and then he kissed me..."

"...went into town and he bought me a beautiful dress..."

"...thought he betrayed me, so I... I tried to kill him, Mother! I thought that he would have been the one who kills Father in this timeline, so I tried to kill him but I couldn't do it and now he's gone and I don't know what to do..."

Sumia attentively listened to her entire story, then, once she was sure that Lucina was finished, she spoke. "So that's why you've been so sad lately. You miss him."

Lucina didn't want to answer verbally in case she started crying in front of her mother. Instead, she gave a quick nod and bit her lip out of nervous habit.

"Oh Lucina..." Sumia sighed. "Why didn't you tell me sooner? You poor girl..." She reached out to put a comforting hand on her shoulder.

"Y...you aren't mad at me?" Lucina asked, shocked at how calmly her mother was taking all this information in.

"Why would I be mad?" her mother smiled. "Well, I suppose a little. I'm mad that you thought you had to do that to Robin, and I'm mad you didn't tell me sooner when I could have helped you, but I'm not mad about what you feel for him."

"I was scared that I had fallen in love," Lucina explained. "And with someone from this timeline especially. I...I didn't think you would approve of me..." She paused, relieved that her mother had done the opposite. "What do I do, Mother?"

"Well, I'm afraid that we may not be able to bring Robin back at this very instant, but he said in his letter to Chrom that he would be back once the war was over, right? It gives us all the more reason to finish this as soon as we can." Sumia started to absentmindedly play with a few strands of Lucina's cobalt hair, pausing every once and a while to pick out a knot or two. Ordinarily Lucina would have objected, for she felt like she was far too old to be babied by her mother, but under the circumstances she didn't feel like arguing. "You really should take better care of your hair, Lucina," Sumia commented in an attempt to lighten her daughter's mood. "It's so beautiful when you clean and brush it out."

"You know I don't have time for that, Mother," Lucina allowed an exasperated smile to flash across her face. "Your appearance doesn't matter in battle. I don't care about looking pretty at all."

"Lucina!" Sumia gave an exaggerated gasp. "Don't say that! You're very pretty and don't you forget it!" She stopped speaking for a moment, carefully phrasing her next statement. "I know... that this is probably hard for you to realize, and it's not your fault that you don't, but there are other aspects of life besides the war. Human beings just can't survive on fear and fighting. Our souls were meant to love, and it's the love that we feel that gives us the strength to overcome our fears and keep on fighting."

"In the future fear reigns supreme," Lucina solemnly reminded her. "It's so hard for me to remember the last time that I felt like someone loved me in that way. You and Father... I lost you when I was very young. I had my friends and my sister, but that was different. I was so confused of what to do when I realized that he loved me, and I loved him back..."

"I know. It's a confusing feeling at first. I...I'm so grateful though that you feel this way."

"What do you mean?"

"It's that, honestly, when you first revealed yourself to be my daughter and my maternal instincts started to kick in, I was... afraid that you would never feel what you do now. I feared, after everything you went through, that you wouldn't open up to someone. That whatever part of you that could truly love someone was pushed so far down into your mind that it wouldn't be able to get out." Lucina was surprised to see Sumia's eyes tearing a little, but she didn't look sad. "I prayed that someone very special would come along one day and help your feelings to surface, and I suppose that Robin was that person."

"Mother..." Lucina didn't know what to say. She hadn't realized that all this time her mother had been so worried about her daughter finding happiness. "Thank you. For caring about me so much, I mean."

"It's what a mother does, love," Sumia wiped her eyes. "If you don't know what to do, you can always come to me. Your mother will always be there for you, even if I'm someplace... very far away."

Lucina inhaled sharply and looked away so she couldn't see Sumia's face. If she looked into her mother's eyes she wouldn't be able to hold back the tears.

Sumia sat patiently next to her, waiting to see if Lucina had anything to say for a few minutes before finally asking in a voice little more than a whisper, "Would it help to have some time alone?"

Lucina nodded while keeping her head hung low, and Sumia slowly stood up, eying her expression carefully. She turned to leave, then hesitated so she could lean down and kiss her on the forehead. "You'll be okay, sweetie. We'll find him." Her mother rose again, and quietly opened the flap to the tent. She paused again, staring up into the sky from the doorway, then with a sigh slipped off. Lucina was left alone with her thoughts, but they seemed the slightest bit lighter than they had moments ago.

Lucina finally tells someone! I wanted to build up Lucina's relationship with her mother to help her cope with Robin's disappearance, because after everything that's happened, I figured Lucina needed some way to let all her emotions out.

But that's not all that Sumia has to bring to this story - I leave you with another chapter, two in one day!

Chapter 12: Burnt Pages

In which Lucina gets an unexpected visitor and finds something else to fight for

Chapter 12 – Burnt Pages

It must have been past midnight already, but Lucina was still wide-awake, sitting up in bed with only a small candle flame for light. A light rain began to fall outside, breaking up the silence of the late hour. She considered numerous times to pull out her dress to look at it, but every time she reached into the chest that held it, her hand faltered and she couldn't bring herself to do so. Seeing it just served as another reminder of the things Robin had done for her that she had so blatantly ignored.

If she had been paying attention, she may have noticed a yellow light outside through the canvas walls of the tent. It was moving closer, steadily rising and falling as its holder walked. The rain muffled the sound of footsteps brushing past the grass from far away, so she only heard them once the light was right outside the tent flap. With a silent gasp, Lucina scrambled to find something to defend herself with against the intruder before a sharp whisper called her name.

"Lucina!"

A pause. Lucina said nothing.

"Lucina!" the voice sounded again, slightly louder. "Are you awake? It's me, Sumia."

"M...mother?" Lucina stuttered in surprise. "Yes, I'm awake." She hurried over and unsealed the flap to find Sumia standing outside, holding a lantern on one hand and a tightly wrapped parcel in the other. "Come in, Mother! Get out of the rain!" she ushered her in.

"Thank you, dear," Sumia looked relieved and stepped inside the tent.

Lucina closed the tent flap to keep the rain out. "What are you doing awake this late, Mother? You should be asleep!"

"I should be asking the same thing of you," Sumia replied, trying to dry herself off. "I was going to wait until tomorrow, but I saw your light on and thought you may want to know now."

"Know what?"

"Well, I just came back from flying on my pegas-"

"You were out?!" Lucina gasped. "How on earth did Father let you go? It's dangerous at this time of night, especially in this rain! You could have been attacked by Risen, or could have gotten lost, or..."

"I'm alright, Lucina," her mother reassured. "The moon is bright this evening, even with the rain. It lit my way. And your father doesn't know that I left. I told him after dinner that my pegasus wasn't feeling well, and I was going to sleep in the stable with her so she would have some company. Animals get lonely too."

"Why did you lie to Father?" Lucina didn't understand: her mother never lied.

"Because after you told me why you were feeling so depressed, I felt responsible as your mother to try and search for Robin again. I asked Frederick where he had already been, then I sneaked out to look where he hadn't."

"You did that... for me?" Lucina was in awe, then got excited. "Did you find him? Is he waiting outside?" She ran back and seized the tent flap with the intent to tear it open before Sumia stopped her.

"I'm sorry, Lucina... I didn't..."

Lucina slowly released the canvas she held and let it fall back into place. "I... should have known," she realized somberly as the world extinguished her flame of hope once again. "...Then why did you come to see me?"

"It's because I didn't find Robin, but I *did* find something. I found his camp," Sumia explained softly.

"B...but, if you found his camp, then he had to be there!" Lucina's desperation sparked the anger in her voice. "He had to! Why didn't you bring him back to me?"

"Calm down, Lucina," her mother responded, slightly taken aback by Lucina's outburst. "He was long gone. There was

nothing left but his abandoned campfire."

"I'm sorry for yelling..." Lucina hid her face in shame. "It wasn't your fault he wasn't there..." She was quiet for a moment before she let her frustration get the better of her again. "But then how did you know it was Robin's camp?" she asked as she tried to control her breathing. "It could have been anyone else's!"

"I know because I found something that belongs to him there," Sumia hesitated. "Something that he left behind."

"Robin wouldn't forget about something."

"He didn't forget about it. He tried to destroy it."

Destroy it? Lucina's anger lost its strength. "...What was it?"

Sumia placed the lantern that she was carrying down on the tiny end-table near Lucina's bedside, and then slowly began to unwrap the package that she was holding, taking great care not to damage it. From the parcel she carefully withdrew a medium-sized book that was burnt at its edges and smothered in ash.

"No..." Lucina couldn't believe that Robin would let that happen. "Robin would never burn a book! He loves them!"

"This isn't just an ordinary book," her mother said somberly. "...It's his journal."

"Robin never told me he kept a journal..."

"I don't think he told anyone. I never heard him nor Chrom mention anything about it before."

"But that still doesn't make sense!" Lucina exclaimed. "Why would he do such a thing to a book as precious as this?"

"I don't know," Sumia sighed. "What I do know is that we're lucky to have it. He must have tossed it into the campfire before he left and something must have put the flames out quicker than he expected."

"Can... can I read it?"

Her mother knew the question was coming, but she still looked slightly worried. Nevertheless, she extended the charred book into her daughter's trembling hands for her to take. "Lucina..." she began. "Before you open it, there's something I want you to know. The things in that book... may bring you great pain, but I won't stop you if you feel like to have to read it." Once the journal was safe in Lucina's hands, Sumia sat down in a chair in the corner of the tent. "I'm going to stay here for a little bit while you read. Just in case."

Lucina nodded in agreement and took a seat herself on her bed, turning all her attention towards the delicate object she held in her lap. The journal's cover was plain but was hanging slightly askew; the binding had been weakened by the flames. She felt it necessary to gently push it back into place before she opened the book to the first page.

It was dated the very same day that she had arrived from the future, the same day that her father had found Robin lying in the field. The page was burnt and difficult to read, but Lucina was still able to capture the feelings of his words: relief and curiosity mixed with a bit of fear. Robin had told her that he felt afraid when he first woke up... The last sentence was intact enough to read, and Robin finished off his first entry.

I don't know who I am exactly, or what my story was like before I woke up, but I'm interested to see how it will continue.

Lucina turned the page, and found that on the next he spoke about the events of that night, including her. It was when she still disguised as Marth, but even so she was wanted to see what Robin had to think. He called the person mysterious but kind: someone who he didn't know anything about yet gave him the feeling that "he" was someone who could be trusted. Robin really was like her father; he already trusted her before he even knew who she was.

She continued to flip pages, briefly skimming over any words or sentences that were legible. Everytime Lucina came to an entry too burnt to read, which was much too often for her liking, Lucina was overwhelmed with loss. The journal was everything that happened since Robin awoke with no memories. It was his life story. Every ruined page was like whatever memory he had recorded never existed now that he wasn't around, like parts of his life were forever gone. Everything she could read was precious.

Lucina saw his first meeting with the Shepards and their fight in Arena Ferox. Curiosity lead Lucina to look more closely whenever she, or in the case of the beginning entries the "masked man", was present at the time. She found Emmeryn's attempted assassination, during which her actual gender was revealed. Robin didn't speak of her much, but the phrases she could pick out before the page crumbled away, or more specifically two words, stood out.

The masked man who has been helping us isn't a man at all. She is actually a remarkable swordswoman and incredibly beautiful...

Incredibly beautiful. That's what he thought she was! The two words alone were enough to warm her heart. She knew it was childish to think so, but she couldn't help it. She needed to know more about what he really thought of her. The burnt pages now filled her with even more despair. What if he had said something important about his feelings for her and now it was lost?

The entries didn't stop once the Mad King had fallen and the Plegian war was over. There were anecdotes of enjoyable times with Chrom and the rest of the Shepards, events that she had never heard of before and was now receiving in fragmented pieces.

Gaius got caught stealing a whole cake from the kitchen again.

Vaike challenged Chrom to a belching contest today. Chrom lost.

Sumia found out that she is pregnant with her first child.

Chrom and Sumia's baby daughter came into the world today. Her name is Lucina.

She was relieved that she hadn't missed it. The entry marked the first time Robin wrote her name. Lucina touched the word and traced the elegant letters with her finger, just as she had done with the letter Robin had left her; the handwriting was the exact same on each. It seemed like the journal was now directly addressing her, as if she was Robin's target audience even though she knew it was just her imagination.

Lucina found the approximate date of when she had finally revealed herself to be Chrom's future daughter on Carrion Isle. Unfortunately, the entry marked a huge set of pages that were even worse off than the previous. They were horribly scorched and many of the ones that weren't completely burnt were coated in ash, but words still clung to the torn paper as if holding on until she had the chance to see them.

...she's Chrom's daughter...

...not my place...

...I could never... but, I can't help what I...

As little as the fragments of sentences told her, Lucina could hardly mask her excitement. Robin had loved her, and he just hadn't said anything for a long time. *Thank the gods this proves me wrong*, Lucina sighed, happy to know for certain that his feelings were sincere and weren't a ruse like she had claimed the other night. Lucina found herself flipping past the rest of the entries searching for the night when he had brought her dinner. It had been the first time that they had really talked together. She couldn't believe her luck when she found the most recent entries to be relatively untouched. She would finally get to know everything that he really thought about her!

The entries were there, but again her hope was crushed. They were farther spaced out and not on the days that she was searching for. He had written nothing about their dinner, her getting injured, and not even their first kiss. Why? It was like the book was playing a sick joke on her. Lucina desperately searched over and over, but could not find any of the dates she wanted except one: the day he had taken her out on their first date. The entry was incredibly short at first glance, but just as she was beginning to have her doubts again of whether Robin really did care, she read the passage and immediately got the sense that it was more important than anything else she had seen.

My headaches are becoming worse in both their frequency and strength. I cannot control them anymore, and now I live in fearful anticipation of when the next one will strike. The one that attacked me today would have been the worst I had ever experienced so far, but she was there. I was able to hold on to her to keep me from being sucked into the darkness that has been plaguing me. She gives me a strength that keeps me fighting.

Robin had mentioned her directly, and in a way that she had never known of before. *She gives me a strength that keeps me fighting*. She had already discovered before that Robin gave *her* strength, but she never knew that she had the same effect on him. She turned back to the pages she had skipped, and the same phrases began to jump out at her more than they had before. Each time she saw the word "headaches" it was linked with feelings of fear, aloneness, and lack of control.

The headache that I got... was one of the same kind that he's been getting, Lucina suddenly realized in horror as she began to flip through the pages more frantically. His headaches aren't just painful. They were torture... His brilliant mind was being tortured every day and he had not once sought help or relief because he didn't want to bother anyone.

"Robin..." she whimpered silently, not caring if her mother heard her. "Why didn't you tell me?"

She flipped past the entry where he had talked about her to find a page covered in scratched-out words and sentences. Upon closer inspection, she realized that they were all meant to start apologies. He must have not liked how any of them sounded. Behind that page, there were two clearly missing, having been torn from the binding of the book. *My father's letter and mine. All the crossing out that I had seen him do before I approached him... That book and this are one and the same!*

The next full page made her gasp out loud. In quivering handwriting, he had written:

I know who I am. My name is Robin. I am a tactician for the Shepherds. Chrom found me lying with no memories in a field. The things that the voice in my head tells me are lies. My allegiance lies with the Shepherds, my real family. I can't forget.

"No, no..." Lucina whispered as if she was speaking to Robin himself and not his journal. His words from before they had entered Plegia Castle came back to her, ones that she hadn't understood but now made perfect sense.

"No matter what happens in there... I'll be there for you. I... I need you to promise me that you won't forget that. And also... promise... that you'll remind me if I forget."

He had been asking her for help, to keep him sane. And what he had said when she had tried to end his life... The tone of his voice and the look in his eyes... She thought he had only been referring to her, but he was talking about what he felt himself as well.

"Because feeling alone, and not feeling like you belong, is such a... terribly sad feeling..."

Sumia stirred, realizing that her fears were becoming true, and became more alert. Lucina desperately flipped through the next few pages. The writing was becoming less and less like a journal entry and more like a one-sided argument, one that Robin was clearly losing.

Stop telling me lies! You can't strip my identity!

"Don't say these things, Robin! You're scaring me!"

Do I belong with the Shepherds? Am I fit to stand with Chrom after what I've done?

"Yes, you are! It wasn't your fault!"

I... I don't know...

Lucina flipped to the final entry, and realized she couldn't bear it anymore and started to cry. Sumia stood up from the chair and walked over to her bed, sitting down next to her like she had a few hours ago. She tried to delicately remove the journal from her daughter's hands so she wouldn't have to see it anymore, but Lucina refused to let her take the book and clung to it tightly, not turning away from Robin's last written words. In massive, shaky letters, the page asked her:

WHO AM I?

"I know who you are..." Lucina spoke as tears rolled down her cheeks. "I know who you are! If you were here I could tell you!" she screamed.

"Lucina, it's okay..." Sumia whispered.

"No! No, Mother! It isn't okay!" Lucina wept. "I need to tell him that he's smart and kind and compassionate and amazing and he puts other people first and that he's the man I love and the man I took for granted!"

"Oh, Lucina..." Sumia puts her arms around Lucina's shoulders and pulled her in closer to her. Lucina didn't care what her mother thought about her feelings anymore.

"He only showed me kindness and I was selfish! He showered me with love and I drowned him in hatred! He's being tortured, Mother! He's in pain and I could have helped him but I pushed him away! What have I done?!"

All Sumia could do was hold her daughter close. "Let it out, Lucina."

"I... I just want this horrible war to be over, and... and I want Robin here with me!" she choked between sobs. "Is that too much to ask? I just want us to be happy! That's all I want!"

"I know," her mother soothed. "I know."

"And now he... he thinks I hate him! He's out there alone and scared and thinks I hate him because I was a stupid fool! I should be the one alone! It should have been me!"

"Lucina, don't say that..."

"It's true, Mother! It's true! All I've ever done is push people away for things they didn't do! All for something that hasn't happened yet! Curse the future! It's turned me into nothing but a heartless beast!"

"Lucina! That isn't who you are!" Sumia was beginning to grow angry. "You came to this time to save millions of people! Millions! You are not heartless. You're a noble princess with incredible intentions and a beautiful heart!"

"A princess? Ha!" Lucina shouted incredulously. "Princesses have stories with happy endings. I'm doomed to a world of loneliness and suffering. Nothing I do will change that!"

Sumia seized Lucina's arms and squeezed them tightly to quiet her. "Then what has everything that you've said before mean? You came here because you *don't* believe in destiny! You wanted to change your fate! Was that a lie?"

Lucina fearfully stared at her mother with teary, wide eyes. She opened her mouth to speak and found that her voice was very small. "No..."

"Then who's to say that Robin can't change his fate as well? Even if he is Chrom's killer in another time! Things are different! They can change!" Sumia's eyes burned with an intensity that Lucina had never imagined possible in her mother. "You and Robin can and will be happy! You can change the future together!"

"He'll never forgive me, Mother! It wasn't his fault and I blamed it for it! He'll never be able to love me again!"

"You did what you believed to be right. I know Robin, Lucina. He'll understand. Robin isn't the kind of person to hold grudges," Sumia's powerful voice reassured. "It makes sense to me now. The way he acted around you, the things he said about you, the things he wrote about you....," she gestured to the journal. "He loves you very much, Lucina, and you love him. You and Robin have something very special, and that bond won't be broken so easily."

"Invisible ties..." The tactician's words came to Lucina's mouth. "Robin said that we aren't pawns of a scripted fate. That we're more than that."

"Exactly, Lucina. Don't you see now? Robin knows there's no such thing as predetermined destiny, and so do you," Sumia let go of Lucina's arms and stood to her full height. "We are going to end this war, and we are going to build the life that you and Robin deserve no matter how long it takes! Is that what you want?"

"Yes..."

"Then promise me that that's what you'll fight for. That you'll fight for what you believe in."

"I promise, Mother."

"Good," Sumia sounded reassured and picked up her lantern from Lucina's bedside. "Now you get some sleep. As soon as we find what we're looking for in the Ruins of Time, we're going straight to find Validar and put an end him and his plans once and for all." She pushed away the tent flap to leave, pausing briefly to remind her of something. "Oh, and Lucina? Then you can feel like the princess you deserve to be," her mother smiled before slipping out of the tent and into the rain.

Lucina watched her go until she completely disappeared, then stood and took a long look at the journal she held cradled in her hands. It could have let itself be destroyed, but the book had held on. Robin's memories were still here. She solemnly pledged to remind him of every single one again if she had to when he came back, and that she wasn't going to let him feel alone or scared either, just like he had told her. It was her new mission.

"I will win this war for you, Robin," she whispered into the night. "And I'm going to bring you home. Things are going to change."

Are all the strange things that Robin has said throughout the past few chapters starting to make sense? I said to pay attention to it for a reason! Lucina is far more important to him than she originally thought, and she's finally beginning to understand that a little too late. Without knowing it, she has essentially been giving him a reason to fight his headaches to keep himself sane. But now that he isn't around her or the rest of the Shepherds, we can see him

slowly starting to succumb...

Ahh sorry, Morgan appears next chapter I promise!

Chapter 13: Disowned by Time

In which the Shepherds arrive at the Ruins of Time and Lucina meets a familiar face

Chapter 13 – Disowned by Time

"There it is," Chrom muttered under his breath, looking a short ways up the face of the cliff. "I should have known this wasn't going to be easy..."

Just as Frederick had described, the Ruins of Time only took a day's march to reach, and after camping a short distance away for the night, the Shepherds were preparing to enter. Whoever constructed the shrine thousands of years ago had not been lax in pursuing aesthetic beauty, a quality that was still reflected in the architecture even after time took its toll. The structure was built into the side of a small mountain, and Lucina could only assume that it stretched even deeper into the earth and was far larger than it appeared from the outside. The pale, reflexive stone that composed the structure rose up out of the clear water from a natural spring, which must have been the result of years of rainfall that pooled around the ruins. Combined with the thin layer of fog that lingered around the area, the shrine certainly gave off a mystic feel, one that made Lucina's skin tingle with silent awe.

The only blemish on the otherwise spectacular view was the fact that the entire shrine was infested with Risen soldiers. Even from far away, Lucina could see them hobbling with uneven steps through the courtyard and in and out of doorways. Even the air around them was tainted with the black smoke that the creatures emitted from their mouths. According to Laurent, who had been able to study Risen quite personally in their future, the creatures, being corpses, didn't actually have to breathe. He surmised that the smoke was a trace of the dark force that animated the monsters which leaked out whenever their mouths opened. Lucina couldn't care less about how the monsters worked; she only knew that they had to be destroyed.

"Why would such filthy creatures infiltrate a shrine to Naga?" Lucina scowled as she wondered out loud. "They don't belong here, or anywhere for that matter."

"Maybe they came here for the same reason we did," Sumia walked up in between her and Chrom.

"You're probably right..." Chrom took his eyes off the ruins. "We'd better get moving then. We don't want the Risen to find Naga's Tear before we do." He raised his voice to address the whole army. "Shepherds! Prepare for battle! We're going to enter the ruins!"

There were some whispered complaints amongst the army about having to climb to reach the shrine, but the Shepherds did as they were told and began their march up the mountainside. Even though Sumia could have flown up of her pegasus, she chose to walk along with Lucina instead. Lucina appreciated her company, even more so now that she understood what she was going through.

"How are you feeling today, Lucina?"

"I'm a little better, thank you Mother," Lucina gave a smile of reassurance, relieved that she didn't have to lie about her feelings for once. She had read Robin's journal a few more times after her mother had left, taking care to look over the pages she had skimmed at first more closely so she knew exactly what he had experienced and what he was facing now. She wanted to know exactly how to help him when he came back, and every word that she read in the burnt book worked to paint a picture of his mental state.

"That's good," Sumia sighed in relief, then looked back up at the ruins in thought. "Lucina, I know that this is sort of a strange question, but what do you think the Risen were like before they were monsters?"

Lucina cocked her head to one side. "What do mean, Mother?"

"I mean, do you think that they were always monsters, or do you think that they're all people, just like us?" her mother asked softly.

"They *were* people," Lucina corrected with a grimace. "I've seen a man become a Risen before my very eyes in my future. With each and every one of our allies who fell in battle, the enemy army grew in number. They aren't people anymore. They're horrible creatures that know nothing but killing."

Sumia didn't seem to be satisfied with her response. "That's sad..."

"Mother, don't tell me you're feeling bad for the Risen. You've fought them countless times before. They don't *feel*

anything."

"But what if it just seems that way? What if they still want to be human too? What if they just want to belong?" Sumia's voice was quiet and contemplative.

"Mother, you can't be serious... They go to places that people congregate to slaughter them, not make friends. They're heartless."

"But maybe, beneath whatever evil is controlling them, there's still some trace of made them human left? What if they don't want to fight us but they're forced to? Maybe they're just... lonely," Sumia wondered in an almost dreamy state.

Lucina still didn't understand. "What made you think of that, Mother?"

"I'm sorry," her mother snapped out of her strange musing. "I was just thinking about how Robin might be feeling with being lonely, that's all. You told me earlier that you wanted to keep his journal so you knew exactly how he felt, so maybe I could give you some ideas." She saw Lucina become tense at the mention of Robin's absence, so she tried to end the conversation. "Think nothing of it, Lucina. Just some rambling from your crazy mother, that's all. I know how much devastation the Risen caused in your future. I got a little carried away in my theory..."

Lucina frowned at what her mother had said. It was like Sumia had shed a new light on the monsters that had plagued her world, but she couldn't start feeling bad for them now. Fortunately, her mother's next statement made her feel better.

"Who knows?" Sumia laughed to lighten the mood. "Maybe by defeating them we're actually freeing them. That would be nice to think about."

"Yes... That would be nice," Lucina agreed. "We're ending the suffering of the fallen. I... never thought about that way before, Mother. It's like I'm helping the friends that I lost find peace."

"Maybe your crazy mother isn't as crazy as she thinks," Sumia laughed again. "Now let's go liberate the dead, shall we?"

"Right," Lucina found herself laughing along with her. "Just promise to treat them as seriously as we always do and not to start a conversation with one mid-battle, okay Mother? They're still our enemies."

"No promises," Sumia joked.

Along with the rest of the Shepherds, Lucina entered the Ruins of Time alert and with blade ready. Even if the Risen still had anything human left in them, they were still dangerous. Lucina actually heard the creatures before she saw them; their heavy, uneven footsteps were amplified by the shrine's corridors and echoed down the halls. Their moans alone were enough to put the hairs on the back of her neck on end, but not because they were frightening; there was little that could scare Lucina anymore after what she had experienced in her future. With the echo from the shrine, the Risen sounded less wrathful and more... melancholic.

Slowly, a set of two, unblinking red eyes pushed their way out of the fog, wobbling uneasily with the creature's stride. One by one the first pair was joined by many others, all darting around like a swarm of bees in the darkness. The Shepherds halted their advance and assumed their battle positions, waiting until the creatures' full silhouettes took shape. As they got closer, Lucina found that there was something that frightened her about these Risen. They weren't moaning, but speaking collectively the same phrase. Yarne and Noire screamed in terror from somewhere in the crowd, and Lucina for a brief moment considered doing the same.

"Kill future child..." they hissed. "Must... kill... future child..."

"Did they know we were coming?" Chrom growled, unsheathing his Falchion and taking a step nearer to her. "Lucina, stay close..."

She briefly looked back into the Shepherds' ranks and saw that the other parents taken on a more defensive posture in front of their children as well. Were these Risen... hunting her and her friends? She didn't want to take the time to find out.

The swarm bellowed an unearthly roar that seemed to shake the corridor, then immediately charged with alarming speed. A few of the Shepherds erupted into battle cries of their own as they met their attackers, the adrenaline of battle searing through their bodies. The first clash of weapons rang out, metal against metal, with dozens more sounding a second later.

Lucina rushed forward, slicing one creature across the chest before withdrawing her blade and plunging it through the torso of another. Catching an incoming attack out of her peripheral vision, she turned to her right and held up Falchion to

counter an axe swing. Lucina exploited the other weapon's weight, shoving it aside to throw the creature off balance then severing its arm, which dissolved into dust as the axe could hit the ground. Before she could finish the Risen off, she was forced to divert her attention to another wielding a shortsword that approached her from behind. Lucina parried its strike with ease, pulling back Falchion to counterattack when again she sensed an attack from behind. She recoiled her arm fast enough to prevent serious injury, but too late to prevent the axe swing from nicking her forearm and drawing blood. The Risen she had attacked apparently believed that an arm for an arm was the only proper trade, and it had picked up its axe in its other hand and was already preparing for another strike.

Lucina slipped past the attack and in the few split seconds she had to recover tried to come up with a strategy for taking her two assailants on at once. Risen never worked in tandem with each other or employed any kind of strategy if they had no leader; they preferred overwhelming their enemies with sheer numbers. For these two to exploit her blind spots together proved that they were being controlled by a much more powerful force, which wasn't exactly the most reassuring knowledge for Lucina in her current situation. Ignoring the cut on her arm, she backed away from immediate danger. The two monsters advanced on her, approaching from opposite directions so that if she were to face one, the other would have a clear strike. The one armed Risen charged her, and Lucina knew she had no choice but to counter it even though it left her back exposed. Unlike before, the Risen refused to be pushed aside so easily after Lucina blocked its axe, and it held its ground in an attempt to overpower her. She was losing precious seconds in the struggle, and she could hear her other assailant's approaching footsteps getting ever closer.

In a burst of strength, Lucina angled the axe just away from her body then pulled Falchion away immediately, causing the weapon to crash to the ground next to her and throw up chunks of stone tile. It gave her just the right amount of time to thrust Falchion into the creature's chest, and it dissolved into smoke before it had the chance to lift its weapon again. Whipping around, Lucina yelped in surprise to find the other Risen already directly behind her, sword held up to attack. She had no time to put up Falchion in defense. *I can't go down here! Not yet!*

As she braced herself for the worst, a blade erupted out of the Risen's torso, halting its finishing blow just inches above her head. The creature stared down for a moment at the weapon protruding from its chest, withdrawing its arm before it dropping its sword and disappearing in a burst of smoke. As the dark cloud cleared, Lucina discovered the unmistakable man at the other end of the weapon.

"Made it jus' in time, Miss Your Royalness," the man sighed in relief as he pushed the pot he wore as a helmet back into place on his head. "You ain't hurt too bad, are ya?"

"Donnel!" Lucina was shocked to realize to had rescued her. "...I'm okay thank you," she stuttered.

"Ya sure? That coulda been ugly," he winced, withdrawing his spear.

"Yes, I'm okay now..."

Donnel turned to joined the fight again, but Lucina felt obligated to apologize. "I'm sorry about what happened in Valm!"

The young man looked confused before his memory kicked in. "Aw shucks, don't you be goin' and worryin' bout that none," he smiled and scratched the back of his head in embarrassment. "I knows you was just tryin' to protect yer pa."

"Thank you... for not being mad at my rashness."

"Naw, no problem. We're all in this together, right? Now we gots a battle to win!" Donnel reassured before gripping his spear and charging back into the Risen horde.

The farm boy was right. Lucina regained her composure and tightened her grip on Falchion, rejoining the Shepherds in the attack. The Risen numbers had already been significantly decreased, but the creatures still fought with intensity and small groups of them continued to stream out of the hallways. They were still groaning on and on, "Kill future child... Kill... future... child." It was terribly unsettling, and Lucina wanted to end the fight quickly.

"Father!" she called out amongst the chaos. "I'll block off one of the corridors so they can't get through!"

"Good idea!" her father cried back, slashing through the bandaged chest of another monster. "Be careful!"

Lucina fought her way over to one of the hallways, cutting down the Risen as they attempted to join their companions in the entrance hall. She wasn't about to let herself get cornered by them again, and took greater care to watch their movements and counter their blows when they attempted to team up on her.

As Lucina cut down another axe-wielding creature, she heard a roar that echoed from the other side of the corridor. The small Risen group she was fighting all turned their heads in the direction of the noise, as if it was beckoning them to

follow it. Lucina took advantage of their distraction, cutting the remainder of the Risen around her down within a few seconds. She herself then turned down the corridor, and thought she saw a cloaked figure being pursued by another group of Risen run past the doorway and disappear down another hallway. Lucina had to rub her eyes with her free hand. It couldn't be possible, but she found herself running down the hallway after the person as fast as her legs could manage.

She must have been seeing things, but she couldn't shake the feeling that the figure had been wearing a familiar black and gold coat... Could he possibly have come here? It had to be him. He had come back for her, and now he needed her help! Lucina could feel her excitement of seeing him again building and giving her strength to keep running at top speed after the Risens' footsteps. Following the sound through another doorway, she found her in a massive, open room where the ceiling had crumbled away, allowing the fog from outside to pour into the shrine. Straining her eyes, she caught the figure again being chased into another hallway at the opposite end of the room. There was no mistaking it now. It was definitely Robin's coat.

"Robin!" Lucina cried at the top of her lungs, but he couldn't hear her from so far away. She grunted in annoyance and broke into a sprint again, trying to catch up with him and his pursuers. The sound of footsteps led her deeper into the ruins, weaving in and out of different rooms and passageways. Getting back wasn't her concern now. She had to get to him.

Finally, Lucina emerged into a smaller room to find Robin backed into a corner, being closed in on all sides by a group of five Risen. She couldn't see his face, for his cowl was pulled up and cast a shadow over his features, but she could tell he was desperate. He hadn't seemed to have noticed her yet, and he revealed an Elfire tome from inside his coat to confront the monsters. Opening the tome, he released a stream of fire from his hand that struck the closest Risen and disintegrated it almost immediately on contact. The creatures paid no mind to their fallen comrade and continued to advance on him. He didn't have the time to cast another spell.

Lucina lunged forward in rage, slashing one of the Risen down the middle with Falchion and stabbing another from behind. Robin used the time to let out another stream of magic, lighting the two remaining creatures on fire. Lucina finished the Risen off with a horizontal slice of her blade, and the two monsters burst into flaming dust.

"Are... you... okay?" Lucina huffed as she tried to catch her breath, sheathing Falchion at her hip.

"I'm okay, thank you!" The voice that responded made Lucina freeze, unable to breathe. She let go of Falchion's hilt and slowly turned to face the person she had rescued. It was Robin's coat, but the voice wasn't his... And why did he seem so much shorter than she remembered?

"You're... not... Robin..." The words gradually came to her lips, but her mind was racing as to who it could be.

The figure dropped the tome and suddenly cried out excitedly in a distinctly feminine voice.

"You know Robin?!" the figure asked eagerly at the very mention of the name, and then reached up to pull down the cowl of the coat. Lucina took a step back in shock as she was greeted by a whirl of blue hair and the face of a young girl, probably around sixteen or so in age.

"My name is Morgan!" the girl told her happily. "Robin is my father!"

Lucina stared at the girl dumbfounded, jaw slowly dropping open. She could only manage a weak "What?" in response.

"Robin is my father," the girl replied again, looking somewhat childishly peeved that she had to repeat herself again. "I was just walking with him just a little while ago... and then I guess I must have fallen asleep or something because when I woke up, I was here and he... wasn't here..." She scrunched up her nose as if she had just smelt something terrible and made a little pout. "I... I can't remember what happened..." She contorted her face more and pressed her fingers to her temples. "I'm trying... to remember... but... I... can't..." she sighed, giving up in her endeavor.

Lucina still couldn't believe her ears. What the girl was telling her was impossible: Robin didn't have a future daughter, or a child at all for that matter. She knew for certain that the girl hadn't come with her and her friends through the portal that Naga had opened for them in the future either.

"We're... talking about the same Robin, right?" Lucina's voice was still small. She had been hoping that she would get to see Robin again, and all she found was this girl who was posing as his daughter. It couldn't be possible. "A little taller than me? Silvery, white hair? Tactician? Loves books?"

"Yep, yep, yep, and yep. That's my dad," the girl replied as she retrieved her tome from the ground and tucked it away. "Oh wait!" she shouted out loudly, making Lucina flinch in surprise. "I do remember something else! From what you just

said! I've been training to become a master tactician, just like him! He told me when I was little..." The girl whipped out her pointer finger and posed as if she was instructing an invisible student, then in what Lucina assumed to be her best imitation Robin voice, the girl said, "Morgan, you're going to make a fine tactician one day." She dropped the act and grinned. "That's what he said. Did I sound like him? I can remember his voice really well!"

She must be lying. What she was saying still didn't make any sense...

"No... No, that can't be true," Lucina reasoned. "Where did you get that coat? You must have stolen it from him! Where is he?" she asked frantically.

The girl looked hurt at her accusations and responded in defense. "Hey, I didn't steal it! Father was letting me wear it when I lost him! I have his Mark too, see?" The girl held up the back of her left hand to expose the very same Mark of Grima that Robin had.

Lucina still was not convinced and shifted her gaze down to the lower right side of the coat. Sure enough, the tea stain was still there, right where she had spilled it what seemed like so many weeks ago. "If you're Robin's... daughter," Lucina asked. "Then would you happen to know where that stain came from?"

The girl lifted up her right arm so that she could get a better glimpse at what Lucina was referring to. She was silent for a moment, glaring intensely at the stain and looking like she was deep in thought, then her face lit up. "Oh! I think I remember that too! Wow, I'm pretty good at remembering things already!" She was quick to comment on her own success before replying. "Father said that Mother spilled some tea on it!"

Mother spilled some tea on it. Mother. The word consumed Lucina's shocked mind. She was the one... who spilled the tea... so that would make the girl... "No, it can't..." she repeated again out loud as she examined the girl more closely. Now that she thought about it, the girl's hair was the same shade of cobalt blue as her own...

As reading her thought, the girl remarked, "Hey, we have the same hair color! Isn't that funny?" She laughed, apparently finding the similarity quite amusing.

Lucina leaned down and looked the girl straight in the eyes. They were Robin's auburn brown. Now that Lucina thought about it, all of the girl's facial features were so much like Robin's as well. It was like she staring right into the face of the man she loved, only it wasn't him. In taking another glimpse of Robin's, no, her eyes, she found something that made her jaw drop. Like she was looking through a mirror, the Mark of Naga in Lucina's left eye was perfectly reflected in the girl's right.

"You..." Lucina gasped. "You have my Brand... In your eye..."

"I do?" the girl asked in astonishment, touching her own right cheek. "Hey... You have it in your eye too," she realized, taking a careful look at the mark in Lucina's eye. "But then..." The girl broke eye contact, staring far into the distance as the gears in her head began spinning furiously. "You have the same mark as me... and we have the same hair color... and you came to rescue me..." she reasoned. "So then that means... You must be..." The girl's brown eyes went wide, and the Brand in her right seemed to brighten as a wide smile quickly overtook her face.

"Mother!"

Lucina has assumed immediate freak out mode... or is it mother mode? Aren't the two the same thing?

Ahhh, Morgan is finally a part of this story! I've wanted her to come in as much as you guys, but... I'm also a tease and leave you at that cliffhanger nyaha...

Ok, story stuff: Donnel makes a surprise cameo! I wanted it to be him who saves Lucina especially now that her life decisions are changing as a little reminder that everyone is looking out for each other and that the farm boy she previously thought of as incompetent isn't such a bad guy after all. She didn't apologize to him sooner because it slipped her mind with all the Robin things going on. Donnel also accepts the apology for her mistake without any second thought, which reminds her yet again that some people deserve to get another chance for their mistakes *cough Robin even though she knows that now cough*

The tea stain makes another appearance, and one of its primary purposes for it was actually in this scene! Almost as a confirmation for Lucina, because she's the only one who could have possibly both spilled tea on the coat and passed down the Brand to Morgan (as technically Cynthia could have passed down the blue hair and Brand as well...). It served quite well in making Lucina really embarrassed at the time, and now it's like a constant reminder of everything they've gone through. Also Robin hasn't attempted to remove it, so I guess he likes it there. Maybe it

reminds him of Lucina too.

Speaking of the Brand, or should I say Brands, if you didn't notice Morgan's two are opposite of her parents: The Mark of Naga/Brand of the Exalt in Lucina's left eye is in Morgan's right, and the Mark of Grima on Robin's right hand is on Morgan's left. Mini headcanon there. I considered "blending" the two Marks together so that they overlapped, which also is what my author's icon is meant to be! My name dualbloodlines is actually a reference to Lucina!Morgan having both the Divine and Fell bloodlines at once! I decided on the opposite-of-parents idea though for this story at least - I thought it would give Lucina a more personal connection to Morgan by having just the Brand in her eye.

By the way, it seems like we've hit over 100 followers and almost 80 favorites to this story already and I wanted to say thanks to all you guys who have taken the time to read/review/favorite/follow! It's really encouraged me to keep up with posting a chapter every week, and I hope you'll enjoy the upcoming Morgan chapters!

Chapter 14: Mother

In which Lucina becomes a parent and wonders how she can keep the secret a secret

Chapter 14 – Mother

"Mother!" The girl froze in place for a second, the sheer excitement reflected in her expression seemingly incapacitating her, and then lunged herself directly at Lucina to wrap her into a massive hug.

Lucina threw up her arms in surprise of the sudden physical contact, and she opened her mouth to protest but couldn't find the will to do so. The girl was still a complete stranger and Lucina's immediate instinct was to throw her off, but a feeling she had never experienced before told her to accept the embrace.

Lightening her grip slightly, the girl tore her face away from Lucina's tunic and looked up at her, eyes watery with joyous tears. "I knew it! I knew you would come back for me, Mother! I knew you would never leave me alone!" She shook her head and gave a small laugh before pulling Lucina back into the hug. "I want you to stay with me forever, Mother!"

Despite her mind still reeling from what the girl had proclaimed, Lucina found herself slowly surrendering her defensive posture. Gradually she relaxed her arms and returned the girl's... Morgan's embrace, and she was surprised at how uncannily similar the experience felt to her own reunion with Chrom. Her response seemed to comfort Morgan even more, and she sighed happily before finally releasing Lucina from her grip. She reached up to wipe her eyes, and then she pushed a strand of blue hair off her face before excitedly beginning to speak again.

"This is so great! Now that I've found you, we can both go back to Father and we can all be a family again, right Mother?"

Lucina winced in guilt at the question, having forgotten for just a brief moment that Robin wasn't around to go back to. Looking down at Morgan's expectant face, she immediately realized that she wouldn't have the heart to tell her why he was actually gone. "About that..." she began, trying to carefully phrase her response. "Your father... isn't here at the moment. He's... on a special mission."

"W...what? But... but I really wanted to see him!" Morgan's cheery expression soon became one of utter disappointment, and some of the color in her cheeks paled. "He... he's all I can really remember," she spoke in a soft voice, as if she was on the verge of tears again. "I t...thought he would be looking for me..."

"Don't cry!" Lucina blurted out, frantically trying to think of anything comforting to tell her. "...Because that's what his mission was! He told me that he was going to go look for you, and that he might be gone for a few days while he searched. I... just happened to find you first." As if the guilt for not being able to bring the girl to Robin wasn't enough, the shame of lying to her innocent face was almost unbearable. From the moment the words left her mouth Lucina knew that the temporary relief that they might bring the girl would not last long at all.

"R...really?" Morgan sniffled and allowed a smile to creep its way back onto her lips. "That's my dad! He's always doing what's best for me!"

"Y...yes, he is," Lucina attempted a smile of her own despite her growing dread that her agreement was only setting the girl up for even greater disappointment.

"I can wait a little bit longer to see him. I'm okay now that you're with me, Mother!" Morgan chirped and took Lucina's hand. "Where are we going to go then? Back home I hope." She paused, staring blankly into space before asking, "But... where is home again, Mother? I... can't remember..."

"You can't... remember? Do you have amnesia? Did you hit your head on something?" Lucina asked in concern.

"I don't think so..." Morgan reasoned. "All I remember is waking up on the ground in these ruins. And a lot of things about Father too, but that's pretty much it."

"That's exactly like what happened to your father," Lucina reminisced.

"Father woke up on the ground without any memories either? Ha! That's so funny!" Morgan laughed. "Like father like daughter, huh? We're so much alike!"

She was so much like Robin, Lucina realized as she looked the girl over again from head to toe. It wasn't just Robin's coat she was wearing, but almost a perfect replica of his usual outfit, and even the girl's confident posture was just like her father's. What struck her the most was that apart from the Brand, Morgan's auburn eyes were identical to Robin's.

Every time Lucina looked into them she saw not the girl but Robin's gazing back at her with the same gentle expression that she had come to associate with so many of her happy memories. Despite the pleasant feeling it evoked, it only made Lucina long for Robin's return more.

"I'm sure you'll remember soon," Lucina reassured. "But I'm not sure if we'll be able to go home right away..." She turned back in the direction from whence she had come, danger senses tingling. "We may have to fight our way out. Do you know how to use a weapon?"

"I know magic!" Morgan reminded her, pulling her tome out of the inside of Robin's coat. "Father showed me how to cast it. He said to focus really hard and to channel the energy through your whole body all the way out to your fingertips, and then you release it all at once! Pretty cool, huh?"

"It is a fascinating skill," Lucina agreed with a smile and motioned for the girl to follow her as she started walking. "A skill quite difficult to master." She was beginning to find the girl's cheerfulness to be infectious.

"Yeah! It was really tough at first, but I think I get the hang of it now. Do you know how to do magic, Mother? I bet Father could show you if you wanted to learn. He's a really good teacher." Morgan tucked the tome away again and hurried over to Lucina's side. "Has Father taught you anything special, Mother?"

"He has..." Lucina replied after some thought. How to fall in love was just one of things that he had showed her. How to not act out of prejudice and attempt something awful wasn't. "I don't think that magic is my cup of tea though," she told the girl, trying not to dwell on Robin too much for the moment. "I much prefer the art of the sword."

Morgan peered at the sheath that Lucina had strapped to her hip. "You have a really powerful-looking sword, Mother," she mentioned. "Where did you get it? Was it a gift from Father?"

"No," Lucina shook her head. "My blade is the divine sword Falchion." She withdrew the sword and held it up for the girl to see. "It was forged thousands of years ago, and after it was imbued with the power of the Divine Dragon herself, it was granted the ability to never break or dull. It's been passed down through the Exalted Bloodline ever since. It was inherited by my father, the current Exalt, who passed it on to me." She took a few short swings at the air with Falchion before sheathing it again.

"Wait, your father is the Exalt? So that makes you a princess?" Morgan's eyes widened in awe.

"Yes, I'm the princess of Ylisse," Lucina confirmed.

"Wow... My mother is a princess! That's so cool!" Morgan exclaimed, squeezing Lucina's hand tighter. "I bet you're the nicest and most thoughtful princess that the world has ever seen, because, I mean, you're my mother, so you've gotta be."

"Thank you, Morgan," Lucina smiled but wasn't entirely sure that Morgan's flattery was justified. And being called "Mother" wasn't getting any easier to get used to. "That technically makes you a princess too you know," she added.

"Oh yeah, it does doesn't it? Will that make me the world's first princess tactician?" Morgan asked excitedly.

"I don't see why not," Lucina laughed softly. Emerging from the corridor, she found that they had arrived in the large, open room again. She found nothing after quickly surveying the room, but didn't like the feeling it was giving her. "Stay close," she whispered in a more serious tone, to which the girl dutifully obeyed. Lucina expected to hear the enemy approaching from the other hallways, but the only sounds were those of her and Morgan's footsteps echoing off the walls as they walked.

"Watch out, Mother!" Morgan cried out in surprise and let go of Lucina's hand, giving her a powerful shove away.

"Morgan, what..." Lucina began to ask angrily why the girl had pushed her until she realized that they were no longer alone. A massive form crashed into the ground behind her, sending her sprawling forward and knocking Morgan to the floor. Lucina rose to her feet immediately and turned to find a Risen mount with an armored griffon mount standing where she had been a split second ago.

The animal shrieked and unfurled its feathery wings to make itself look larger and more menacing. Lucina's mind was consumed by the single realization that it had cut her off from Morgan, and she immediately drew Falchion and charged. The Risen that sat on the griffon's back twisted its head at her, and then it commanded its mount to pounce forward, covering more distance faster than Lucina had anticipated. Mid-sprint, she crouched to build up power then leapt off the ground, holding Falchion over her head to strike the rider. Just as she was about to bring her blade down into the monster's skull, the Risen lashed out with a surprisingly accurate swing of its axe, easily countering her attack in mid-air.

and forcing her to land.

Using the momentum from its first swing, the creature brought down its weapon in one fluid motion on Lucina again. Holding Falchion horizontally above her with two hands, Lucina blocked the strike, but the Risen continued to force the clashed weapons down over her head. She immediately adapted her grip in an attempt to push back, keeping her right hand firm on Falchion's hilt while pressing the palm of her left hand against the flat edge of the blade, but even with her improved stance she realized that her attacker was far stronger than she was in terms of physical strength. Lucina felt her knees beginning to buckle under the sheer weight being forced on her, and in her vulnerable state hardly had time to react when the griffon lashed out and kicked her directly in the chest with one of its bird-like frontal legs. The sudden blow knocked the wind out of her lungs and threw her to the ground a few feet away.

Lucina groaned in agony and tried to roll herself over, but she felt too weak to even reach to her side and grab hold of Falchion, which had clattered to the floor next to her. The griffon was already standing over her before she could right herself, and she braced herself for another blow. Before the creature's axe could finish her off, a stream of fire sailed through the air and struck the griffon's back, causing the animal to cry out in pain and turn away from Lucina to face the source of the attack.

"Get away from my mother, you freak!" Morgan screamed loudly from the other side of the room, then let loose another fire burst from her hand. The magic soared over the griffon's head and dissipated in a small explosion against the opposing wall. Like the girl had hoped, the Risen turned its attention away from Lucina's crippled form and glared at its other attacker. The creature was motionless for a second, and then its red eyes gleamed intensely as it pointed a crooked finger at the girl.

"Future child..." the Risen growled in a raspy voice. "Must... kill... future child..."

Ignoring Lucina completely, the Risen instead commanded the griffon to pursue another target. The revelation hit Lucina harder than the griffon could ever have managed. The Risen hadn't come here for Naga's Tear. They had come for...

"Morgan!" Lucina weakly shouted, struggling to get herself back onto her feet.

"Mother!" the girl returned Lucina's call, voice reflective of her growing state of panic as the griffon approached. Like a predator stalking its prey, the animal prowled forward, forcing Morgan to retreat into a corner. Desperately she tried to cast another fireball, but had no time to aim properly and only succeeded in scorching a few of the griffon's feathers. The animal flailed its wings in front of itself in rage, knocking Morgan's tome from her hands in the process.

"Kill... Kill future child..."

The pain was nothing to Lucina now. Retrieving Falchion from the ground, she broke into a labored run.

"Morgan!"

"Help me, Mother!" the girl pleaded, finding all of her escape routes to be blocked off.

The griffon screeched loudly and rose onto its hind legs to a terrifying height, and at the top its rider held its axe ready for a killing blow on the all but defenseless girl, who could do nothing but cover her head with her hands.

"No!" Lucina screamed in both fear and anger. She couldn't allow anything to hurt her daughter. With adrenaline rushing through her body, Lucina channeled what remained of her strength into a desperate stab into the animal's hind leg, forcing her blade to drive as far into the flesh as it would allow. Immediately, crimson blood fizzled to the surface of the griffon's skin and it howled in agony, throwing its rider off its saddle. The Risen fell to the stone floor in a disorganized heap, and freeing Falchion from the griffon's leg, Lucina was not about to give it a chance to get back up. With the heel of her boot, she delivered a sharp kick to the creature in the face, causing its neck to twist around with a sickening crack. Finally, she held Falchion high in the air and brought the blade down through the monster's chest, pinning it to the ground.

"Kill..." the Risen gasped, emitting a burst of black smoke from its mouth before its body fell apart into shadowy dust.

The griffon lowered itself back down from its upright position, whimpering as it tucked its wounded leg closer to its body. As much as Lucina hated to have to hurt it, it had been her only option. When she tried to approach it, the animal looked at her fearfully and took a few flaps of its mighty wings to lift itself off the ground. With another weaker screech, it rose into the air, soaring out of sight through the caved-in ceiling. Lucina watched it leave in silence, trying to calm her heavy breathing as the pain in her chest was slowly becoming more apparent.

"Mother! Mother, are you okay?" Morgan asked frantically as she scrambled to her side. "Are you hurt?"

"It's not that bad..." Lucina replied. "I just... need to catch... my breath..."

The girl did not look convinced, nervously looking Lucina over to find any major injuries. "This is all my fault! I was careless... I promise I'll do better next time something like that happens, Mother!"

"It wasn't your fault, Morgan," Lucina spoke softly, easing her breathing rate. "I didn't see it coming either. You could have never predicted it."

"But that's what a tactician has to do... Take all possible dangerous scenarios into account to prepare for anything."

"Hey," Lucina put her hand on the girl's shoulder. "You saved me, didn't you? If you didn't distract the griffon with your magic, I may not have lived its attack. I think you handled that situation pretty well."

Morgan looked up at her and smiled. "I guess I did... Thanks, Mother." She wrapped her arms around Lucina and gave her a quick embrace just to make sure that she was okay. "But you saved my life twice already! I have to be the one to save you next time so we can make it even, okay?"

"We'll see..." Lucina laughed, and then remembered the cut she had received from the battle near the entrance to the ruins. "Will it count if you help me with this scrape on my arm?" She held it out for the girl to see.

"Mother! That isn't a scrape! That's like, the biggest cut I've ever seen!" Morgan gasped. "Um... I think Father keeps some emergency bandages in here somewhere..." She rummaged through the inside pockets of Robin's coat. "Here they are!" She withdrew a roll of gauze and a long strip of cloth bandage.

Lucina pulled back the sleeve of her undershirt, and Morgan went to work wrapping it with the gauze before very carefully securing it with the entire cloth strip.

"All better," Morgan grinned as she secured the loose end of the cloth. "Does it feel alright?"

Lucina could hardly flex her elbow, and she was about to mention that the girl had gone a little overboard with the bandages, but she decided against it.

"It feels much better. Thank you, Morgan."

"That's good. I should pursue a triple career as a princess-tactician-cleric!"

"Um, maybe stick with just two for now..."

"What were those things, Mother?" Morgan asked quietly after retrieving her Elfire tome from where it had been knocked away from her. "They've been chasing me through this place ever since I woke up. They look human, but they're a lot scarier..."

"Risen," Lucina scowled at the word, taking a cloth out of a small pouch at her belt to wipe Falchion's blade before sheathing it. "Creatures of the dead who roam the world of the living."

"That explains a lot," the girl shivered. "Let's get out of here, Mother. I don't want to run into another one of those things."

"Yes, let's," Lucina nodded and pointed out the right direction to take. "I came in through there. Come on." Morgan hurried to join her, sticking a little bit closer than she had before the attack.

"Who are we going to go see?" she inquired innocently.

"We're going to meet up with my father," Lucina replied absentmindedly, still focusing on what directions to take.

"Your father the Exalt? So my grandfather then, right? I bet he's super nice like you are, Mother," Morgan blissfully surmised.

The word "grandfather" hit Lucina almost as hard as "Mother" had. She had completely forgotten: what was she possibly going to tell her father? Morgan was physical proof that she had a relationship together with Robin, and that somehow in a different timeline had a child with him... She turned nervously to the girl, who was walking with a spring in her step and probably thinking what Chrom would be like.

There was no doubt in her mind now that Robin was Morgan's father. The two looked so similar that the only thing that could have identified the girl as her child was her hair color, a trait hardly conclusive to parentage. The Brand in her eye however secured the fact that she was from the royal bloodline some way or another; unless Robin had married Cynthia, which Lucina figured was almost impossible, Morgan was her daughter.

She couldn't possibly hope to hide the girl from Chrom, and he would find out within a day or two regardless, and leaving the girl here was out of the question. Lucina saw no way out. She had tried as hard as she could to keep her relationship with Robin away from her father for as long as she could, but Morgan's simple presence was enough to shatter that illusion into pieces.

Lucina could faintly hear some of the Shepherds' voices echoing through the hallway; they were getting close. She didn't show it to Morgan, but she was having an internal panic attack trying to prepare herself for the inevitable stares and whispers that the girl would attract and to come up with what she would say to her father. The voices grew louder until Lucina found that the entrance hall was just around the corner. She stopped walking and turned to face the girl behind her.

"Morgan, just... try not to attract too much attention to yourself, okay? Act as calm as you can," she warned.

"I'll do my best!" the girl complied and gave a little salute, dropping her bouncy walk and becoming more serious.

"Here we go..." Lucina whispered under her breath, and she turned the corner with Morgan following close by. The hall was devoid of Risen, and the Shepherds were all conversing in a group, presumably centered around her father. It was bad enough to have to tell her father, but now she would end up telling everybody... *Of course...*

Like she had anticipated, as soon as they emerged from the corridor a few of the Shepherds who noticed Morgan immediately started whispering furiously and giving confused glances. Lucina put on a stoic face, and doing her best to completely ignore what the rest of the army thought, she marched straight through the group directly towards her father. Morgan kept close, trailing her every footstep and curiously returning a few of the Shepherds' stares.

"Lucina!" Sumia ran over to her as soon as she saw her and embraced her tightly. "Oh, Lucina..." Her mother almost started crying as she spoke. "I thought I had lost you..."

Chrom wasn't far behind and took both of them into his arms. "We thought the Risen had taken you," he explained in concern. "Oh gods, don't scare us like that."

"I'm okay, Father. Really, I am," Lucina tried to wriggle out of her parents' grip but found her attempts to be hopeless until they released her on their own accord.

"What did you think you were doing, running off like that without telling us where you were going?" Sumia scolded. "I almost had a heart attack!"

"I'm sorry, Mother..." Lucina apologized. "I just saw someone in the other corridor being attacked, and I had to leave to help."

"Who?"

In response, Morgan cautiously emerged from behind Lucina's back and gave a friendly wave. "Hi!"

Chrom and Sumia stared back at the girl with blank faces, completely caught off guard by her appearance. Both were completely silent for an uncomfortable amount of time, and Chrom was finally the first one to speak in a slow, perplexed voice.

"...Lucina? Why is this girl wearing... Robin's coat?"

Lucina had planned a delicate response to the question beforehand, but Morgan spoke up excitedly at the mention of Robin's name.

"Robin is my father!"

Lucina cringed as her parents' jaws fell open slightly. She had forgotten to tell Morgan to let her do the explaining. More silence.

"Lucina?" Chrom asked her again. "I thought you said that Robin didn't have a daughter from your time..."

"He didn't," Lucina explained. "But he does now."

Sumia took a few steps closer to the girl, thoroughly examining her in the process. When her mother peered into Morgan's eyes, Lucina immediately knew the charade was over. "Chrom..." she motioned for her husband to come look.

"She has the Brand..." her father's eyes widened.

"Are you my grandparents?" the girl blurted out, not recognizing the tense atmosphere of the conversation. "Yeah, you have the Brand too, Grandfather!" she pointed out the Mark of Naga on Chrom's shoulder.

"Grandfather?"

Before Chrom even had time to comprehend the meaning of the word, Morgan gave him a loving hug. "Did you miss me, Grandfather?"

Chrom stood as stiff as a plank of wood, completely and utterly dumbfounded. His expression may have been funny under different circumstances if it didn't terrify Lucina at the moment. She had no idea how he was taking this news other than the fact that he didn't look too thrilled to be hugged by someone he didn't know.

Morgan tore herself away from Chrom and immediately clung to Sumia. "Hello Grandmother!" she smiled widely. "Wow, you look great for your age!"

"Umm, thank you?" Sumia wasn't really sure how to reply either, but nevertheless she returned the girl's embrace.

Lucina laughed nervously and took Morgan by both the shoulders, separating the girl from Sumia and holding her close.

"Lucina... do you mind explaining who exactly this girl is? And why she just hugged us?" Sumia asked, trying to remain very calm.

Chrom hadn't moved an inch. "...G...Grandfather?"

Lucina nervously eyed him before explaining. "Mother, Father... This is Morgan. My... daughter..."

"Your daughter..." Sumia repeated. "And the father is..." Lucina saw a smile of understanding slowly form on her mother's lips. The same couldn't be said for her father.

Chrom's gaze shifted from Lucina, to Morgan, then back to Lucina in disbelief as the words slowly started to sink in. "Lucina... you and... Robin?" Chrom's teeth gritted in anger, and Lucina braced herself for the worst. "Did he... Is that..." He took Lucina by the shoulders abruptly. "What did he do to you!?" he growled, releasing her and placing his hands on Falchion. "I swear to Naga if that's why he ran away I'm going to find him right now and-"

Lucina's face immediately grew a bright shade of red as she began to understand what her father meant. "No! No, Father! That isn't what happened!" she protested. "He would never do that!"

"Then how did *she* get here!?" Chrom pointed directly at Morgan, who was taken off guard by his anger and cowered next to Lucina.

"I don't know! But nothing like *that* happened!" Lucina tried to figure out how she could reassure him.

"Sumia, what do you think of this?"

"Listen to her, dear..." Sumia soothed in an attempt to calm him down and gestured back towards Lucina.

"F...Father... I'm sorry that I didn't tell you this sooner... but I... love... Robin..." Lucina stammered, growing embarrassed. As soon as she uttered the three words the Shepherds broke out into more intense whispers, muttering about Robin and eying her strangely. Lucina thought she heard an "Oh my gods" from Severa somewhere in the back of the group, but figured it would be best to ignore it for now.

Chrom's anger began to fade, and he removed his hands from Falchion's hilt. Noticing Lucina becoming uncomfortable, Sumia stepped in to the conversation again.

"She does," her mother confirmed.

"Sumia? You were in on this too?"

"Only for a few days. She told me before we came here. It's why she's been so sad lately." Sumia explained, then turned to Lucina. "Is... it alright if I tell him, Lucina?"

Lucina hesitated, but nodded her head in agreement. "It would be better if he knew now. But... quietly..." she added, aware that most of the other Shepherds were listening in on the conversation as well.

Sumia heeded her request and leaned in closer to Chrom, briefly reiterating everything that Lucina had told her before about Robin in a hushed undertone. While her mother was doing so, Lucina heard another familiar voice call out to her.

"Lucy! Lucy!" An energetic hand rose up as Lucina's younger sister pushed her way through the crowd and into the small clearing that the Shepherds had formed around the center. "Lucy! You didn't tell me you had a daughter!"

"Cynthia... You don't have to shout..." Lucina mumbled, aware of how much attention her sister could draw. "...And please don't call me that. You know I don't like it..."

"Sorry!" Cynthia apologized quickly before turning to Morgan. "Hey there! I'm Cynthia! Your heroic Aunt Cynthia to exact!"

"Hello Auntie!" Morgan smiled.

"C'mon! Hero handshake!" Cynthia stuck out her arm expectantly.

"A what handshake?"

"Cynthia, no one knows your hero handshake except you and Owain..." Lucina groaned. Her sister had attempted it multiple times to different people with no success.

"I know, but I just wanted to try! It's the hero standard for greeting each other!" Cynthia protested.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Auntie, but I can try," Morgan complied, sticking out her hand as well.

Lucina was tempted to shut her eyes to spare herself the embarrassment, but as soon as Cynthia and Morgan both struck the same pose simultaneously she couldn't help but stare on in disbelief. Cynthia's eyes brightened with excitement and had to bite her tongue to prevent herself from yelling out as the younger girl matched her poses perfectly in succession, finally ending the move in a normal handshake.

"Oh. My. Gosh. Lucy...Lucina! Did you see that!" Cynthia burst as soon as they were finished. "She knows my handshake perfectly!"

Despite what she thought of as impossible earlier, Lucina began to have doubts regarding whether or not Cynthia actually *was* Morgan's real mother. No one else knew Cynthia's poses... "W...What?" she managed weakly. "Morgan, how did you know that?"

"I don't know..." Morgan looked as confused as Lucina was. "It just... came to me I guess..."

"That's so cool!" Cynthia cried out again, grabbing the girl's arm. "I need to show you to Owain right now!"

"Calm, Cynthia..." Sumia interrupted, having finished her talk with Chrom. "You'll have time to do that later."

"Sorry, Mother!" Cynthia released Morgan's arm and took a few steps backward, sensing that her father was about to speak judging from the way he was rubbing his chin. Lucina had forgotten for a moment that Sumia was telling him everything about Robin, and she quickly grew tense again over what he would possibly say. The whole room fell silent as Chrom thought.

"That sly dastard..." he spoke at last. The smile that grew on his face provided Lucina with much needed relief. "Slipping right past me to sweep my daughter off her feet. I even know how crafty he can be, but I would never have guessed."

"You... aren't mad?" Lucina had the feeling that she had this same conversation with her mother just the other day.

"What about it would make me mad?"

"Robin and I were just concerned that if we told you that you wouldn't accept our relationship. I didn't want to tell you because you two are such good friends, and I thought you wouldn't like him being your daughter..."

"Hey, I understand why you may have thought that," Chrom grinned. "But out of all the other people in this world who you could have chosen, I'm happy that you picked someone who I know that I can trust. I can't let my daughter run off with just anybody, can I? Honestly I couldn't have picked anyone else better for you." He smirked mischievously, getting another idea. "As an added bonus it also gives me something to hold over him. If he does anything I don't like I can threaten to take you away..."

"Chrom, honestly. I'm married to a child." Sumia rolled her eyes. "Stop scaring her and just be happy for them."

"I *am* happy," Chrom protested.

"Wait, I just realized something!" Sumia suddenly exclaimed, turning her attention to the girl next to Lucina who had been surprisingly quiet throughout the entire conversation. "I'm a grandmother and don't have a single wrinkle! As soon as I

had you Lucina I thought how lovely it would be to have a grandchild, and now that dream has come true!" She excitedly reached over to rustle Morgan's hair. "And she's so precious!"

"Calling me a grandfather makes me feel old..." Chrom murmured. "At this rate I'll be a great-great-grandpa before I hit fifty..."

"Hey Chrom!" Vaike's voice called out jokingly. "I'm not sure if I can be rivals with such an old man! The Vaike's gonna have to take it easy on ya next sparring match!"

"Not now, Vaike..." Chrom located Vaike in the crowd and gave him a disapproving stare, to which the man only responded with a massive grin.

"Don't be goin' and breakin' any of your crusty bones now!"

Chrom only groaned and turned back to the conversation.

"So, Morgan, was it?" Sumia asked. "What was your future like before you came here?"

"Future?" Morgan looked confused. "What do you mean, Grandmother? I'm from here."

"Lucina, she doesn't remember?"

"No..." Lucina replied. "She has memory loss, just like her father apparently. I... must not have brought up the future with her before..."

"I don't understand," Morgan held her head. "What are you talking about, Mother? You know me, don't you?"

"Actually Morgan, I just met you today... You... aren't from this time. You come from years in the future."

"I what? That's ridiculous, Mother!" Morgan cried in disbelief.

"Well, I guess try to think about this: do I really look old enough to have a child as old as you are?"

"...No. Not really," the girl gradually spoke after looking Lucina over another time. "But then how are Grandfather and Grandmother not older then? They don't look too much older than you either, Mother."

"That's because I came to this time from the future as well," Lucina explained. "You must have come from a different timeline than mine."

"...That's... really confusing..." Morgan thought intensely. "But I guess it makes sense if you say so."

"We can talk about it more later if you want to, Morgan."

"Okay," the girl agreed, but then frowned as something else came onto her mind. "But wait, Mother... You said that Father was gone because he was looking me, but if I'm really from the future, wouldn't he not know that I was here?"

Lucina had desperately hoped that the girl had forgotten about that. She knew she shouldn't have given her that false hope. "Yes... You're right... The truth is, he isn't gone because he's looking for you. He's gone... because I made him leave..."

Morgan's eyes widened in shock. "W...What? Why would you... why would you make him leave if you love him, Mother?"

The torrent of emotions on Morgan's face was making Lucina revisit all of her feelings regarding the incident. "I thought... I thought that he was the one who will kill my father in this time..."

"Kill me?" Chrom asked. "Why would you possibly think that, Lucina? Robin would never try to hurt me!"

"I... I don't know... I haven't told anyone this, but in my future, Father, you... were betrayed by your closest friend, and after I saw Robin steal the Fire Emblem I thought I had proof that Robin was that person..."

"But Lucina, you know that it was Validar controlling him. He didn't act out of his own free will."

"I know that... but I was scared that something was going to happen to you very soon, and I was angry because I thought that he had lied about loving me. I let that blind anger get the better of me, and... and I tried to kill him! But I couldn't do it, Father! Not even for you!" Lucina felt herself growing teary-eyed again. "I loved him too much to do it! And now he's gone... I'm so sorry, Morgan..." she addressed the girl beside her. "It's my fault your father isn't around to be with you... I've only

been a mother for a few minutes and I'm already terrible at it!"

"No, don't say that, Mother!" Morgan cried. "You... you just made a mistake, that's all! You can fix it, right?"

"I can't..." Lucina whispered. "I can't... I have no idea where he is, or when he'll come back, or even if he'll come back..."

"We can find a way to bring him back, Mother!"

"Don't... don't call me that, Morgan..." Lucina stammered. "You deserve a better mother than me... I'm a terrible person..."

"B...but!"

"I understand now..." Lucina spoke in a somber voice. "You must not remember me because you're suppressing those memories... I must have been such a bad mother to you that you didn't want to remember anything about me..."

"N...no! That isn't true, Mother! I can remember! I can remember everything for you! You were always... Umm... I meant to say that when I was little, you..." She started to panic, frantically hitting her hand with her hands. "I can remember!" she yelled to convince both Lucina and herself. "You... you said to me..."

Morgan's inability to remember only strengthened Lucina's assumption. Even Cynthia could be a better mother to Morgan than she ever could. "I don't know how to raise a child. I... I can't even decide between what's right and wrong. First I try to kill Robin and now I lied to you about it. I can't be a mother... I just can't..." Unwilling to break down in front of the entire army, Lucina attempted to put on the stoic face that she was used to wearing to hide her feelings, and with her final conviction she began to march out of the ruins. The rest of the Shepherds said nothing and only cleared a path for her.

"Lucy...Lucina! Don't go!"

"Wait! M...Mother! Come back!" Morgan tried to run after her, but Sumia caught her by the arm.

"Just give her some time to sort this all out, sweetie."

"I... I can't lose her too..." Morgan whispered in a voice only Sumia could hear.

"You won't," Sumia soothed, hugging the girl close. "You won't."

Morgan could only watch with teary eyes as her mother disappeared from view.

Lucina didn't stop walking until she reached the camp at the foot of the mountain. She was plagued with guilt and shame and uncertainty and regret. Pulling aside the flap to her own tent, she ducked inside and covered her face with her hands. All she could think about was Morgan's terrified face when she had practically disowned her, and how much it reminded her of Robin's on that night so many nights ago.

I promised more Morgan, so I hope I didn't disappoint with this long chapter stuffed with all sorts of feels!

Auntie Cynthia got her debut as well, because I realized that she hasn't physically appeared in this story up until now! For anyone wondering, they fight a griffon because the Risen Chief in the Ruins of Time paralogue is also a Griffon Rider who mumbles something about needing to kill a future child when you engage it in battle.

Did Chrom react like you thought he would? He got a little worried at first that Robin ran away and abandoned Lucina because... you know..., but he's actually really accepting of their relationship once he gets the full story! Now Robin just needs to come back soon and everything will be fine... Right?

Poor Morgan... Her father isn't around and now her mother doesn't believe that she really is her mother...

***Chapter 15*: Light in the Dark**

Ugh I'm sorry this is so late... I've had a lot of work to do and couldn't finish until now... Enjoy!

In which Lucina relives her past and remembers something she had forgotten

Chapter 15 – Light in the Dark

"This way! Hurry!"

"Where are we going, Mother?"

"Away from here! Now come on!"

Lucina could barely see. Black smoke poured from the fires that raged around them and scorched her lungs as she struggled to find clean air. Reaching up with her free hand, she covered her mouth as she let out a raspy cough. She had to squint near the point of closing her eyes entirely, for the fumes that lingered in the air stung when she opened them. Her ears were bombarded with so many noises coming from all directions that they seemed to blend together into one deafening roar. Crackling of fire, crashing stones as walls collapsed somewhere above them, and a multitude of screams all fueled the cacophony.

Lucina's seven-year-old legs were aching. She had never run this fast for so long, not even when she was playing outside in the courtyard. Lucina thought that she had known all of the corridors in the castle like the back of her hand, but as they turned down one after another, weaving between fallen debris and taking numerous detours wherever flames blocked their path, she slowly started to lose track of where she was and every room began to appear foreign. Lucina still couldn't fully comprehend what was happening, but it was terribly frightening. Her mother's hand wrapped around hers was the only comfort she had in the chaos.

She stumbled to keep up, but even though she was sure that she was slowing them down, her mother never let go of her. Lucina tried to open her eyes slightly, just enough so that she could catch a better glimpse of her only pillar of strength ever since her father died. People called her mother scatterbrained and clumsy, but Lucina felt privileged to be one of the people who knew that none of that superficiality was true on the inside. Even now amidst all the confusion, with a lance strapped to her back and a terrified Cynthia cradled in one arm, Sumia looked more determined than ever. She led Lucina deeper into the unknown, never hesitating, never pausing to look back. Not once did she trip.

Sumia brought her down another flight of stairs, and then turned the corner into a narrow passageway. Just as the clamor seemed to be fading away behind them, the entire world seemed to shake with a massive explosion. Stone dust burst out of cracks in the walls, and suddenly parts of the ceiling came crashing down all around them. As an immediate instinct, Sumia pulled her hand away from Lucina's, using it to cover Cynthia's head as she dropped to the floor, sheltering the younger girl's body with her own. Separated from her mother, Lucina could do nothing but scream and cover her head in a desperate attempt to protect herself from the falling rumble. The collapse took mere seconds, but Lucina's fear wasn't eased when it was over. The dust still lingered in the air and made her eyes sting even more than the smoke had. Lucina squeezed them shut tighter and covered her face with her hands.

"Mother! Mother!" she wailed, tears streaming down her soot-coated face.

"Lucina!" her mother responded. It sounded so close but too far away. "Lucina, where are you?"

"H...Help me, Mother!" Lucina sobbed.

"I'm coming! Just keep talking to me so I can find you," Sumia's voice contained noticeable panic, but she tried to maintain a calm tone as to not frighten her daughter even more. "Just keep talking to me! I'm coming!"

"I'm here, M...Mother! I'm here!" Lucina did her best to stifle her cries so she could do as she was told. "I'm here!"

"There you are!" Lucina heard her mother sigh in relief after the longest few seconds of Lucina's entire life. As soon as she felt someone touch her arm, Lucina threw herself into Sumia's direction and latched on to her leg.

"D...Don't do that again, Mother! That was s...scary!"

"I know, sweetie... I'm so sorry I let that happen..." Sumia hugged her free arm tightly around Lucina. "We're almost there, and then we'll be safe. We just need to meet Auntie, okay? Just a little further."

"A...Are you s...sure?" Lucina whimpered, unwilling to have to let go of her.

"Yes, I promise," Sumia reassured, and then took her by hand again before breaking into a run. Lucina tried to keep up but was now fully recognizing how tired she really was.

"Why... do we have... to keep running, Mother?" she huffed, unable to catch her breath.

Sumia turned her head behind her briefly, and then quickly snapped her attention back to where she was going. "We're being followed..." she said after a moment of consideration as to whether or not to answer the question truthfully.

"By what?"

"Terrible things. Monsters."

"The same ones that keep trying to hurt everyone?"

"Yes, those ones."

Lucina looked behind her to check for herself, but saw no signs of any pursuers. Nevertheless, she trusted her mother and did not deny her judgment. The thought of being chased gave her some motivation to push herself to keep running, but Lucina just couldn't keep pace with her mother for much longer. Fortunately, after turning one more corner, Lucina heard a familiar voice call to them.

"Sumia! Thank the gods you're alright!"

"Lissa! You stole the words right out of my mouth," Sumia slowed her run to a stop, and Lucina gratefully accepted the respite.

"Are any of you hurt?" Lon'qu asked, observant eyes darting between them.

"No... We're okay. Where's Owain?"

"He's here," the man gestured behind Lissa, where the young boy was standing cautiously with a fistful of his mother's dress. Owain peeked out from his hiding spot, letting a small smile form on his lips upon seeing the familiar faces.

"The passageway is clear, Sumia," Lissa told her. "It's the only way out."

"Good. We have to hurry. We were followed down here." Sumia gently placed Cynthia down on her feet in order to free both her hands.

The girl wobbled unsteadily for a moment then immediately ran over to Lucina and grabbed hold of her arm. Just like Lucina, Cynthia's still babyish face was smothered in soot, now almost a uniform grey apart from the few lines of exposed skin where her tears cleansed her cheeks. She was visibly trembling, and pressed her little body closer to her sister's.

"Hi, Cynthia," Lucina did her best to modulate her mother's soothing tone. "It's okay. Do you want me to clean your face for you?" The girl nodded. Lucina pulled up one of her dress sleeves over her hand, and gently made an attempt to wipe the dust from Cynthia's face. She wasn't able to get much progress done, for it was as if the soot had permeated Cynthia's very skin, but she at least cleared the dust from around the girl's eyes, nose, and mouth. Lucina pulled back her dirty sleeve and asked, "Does that feel a little bit better?"

Again Cynthia nodded, and sniffled before she tried to speak. "T...Thanks, Lucy."

"You're welcome," Lucina smiled warmly and looked over towards her mother again. She noticed that a small bookshelf was out of place, and the adults were standing in front of an open passageway that Lucina had never seen before. It looked terribly dark and cold inside, and Lucina couldn't see any light coming from the other end.

"Come Lucina, Cynthia," Sumia waved them over to her. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to run again."

"Where does this door go, Mother?"

"It will take you out of the castle and to the outskirts of town."

"But I don't want to leave home..."

"Don't worry. It's only for a little while..."

Sumia walked over to a small table and retrieved an old lantern, lighting it before returning to the doorway. "You're going to need this," she told Lissa as she handed the light over.

Lissa frowned as she took the lantern in one hand. "Wait, Sumia... What do you mean I'm going to need this? You mean we're going to need this. You're coming, aren't you?"

Sumia was silent, and then shifted her gaze towards her two daughters before responding. "No. I can't come with you right now. I need to stay here."

"W...What?"

"No!" Lon'qu growled. "You can't possibly mean that! You need to come with us."

"I need to defend the castle for as long as I can. Our forces still have a chance, and I need to lead them."

"Sumia, the castle is lost!" Lon'qu shouted angrily.

"This is what Emmeryn would have done. Stayed with her people!"

"You aren't Emm!" Lissa cried. "You're in a completely different situation, Sumia! You have two children! I don't care if you're the exalt now after what happened to Chrom! W...Who's going to be there for Lucina? How about Cynthia? They-"

"You will," Sumia interrupted. "You have to keep them safe for now."

"Emm wouldn't have done this! Not if she had children!"

"Someone needs to stay behind," Sumia's voice was unwavering. "Someone needs to close the entrance to this passage from outside. If I don't stay, the Risen will find this place and we'll have no hope of using this passage anytime in the future."

Lucina was just beginning to grasp the magnitude of what her mother was saying. "M...Mother? What do you mean you'll stay? You said that we need to leave together!"

"It's the only way I can keep you safe, love..."

"No, it isn't," Lon'qu spoke again slowly, then stepped forward and gripped the hilt of his sword. "I'll stay. Lucina and Cynthia need you, Sumia."

"But what about your own son? Owain needs his father too."

The man winced at the mention of the name. "H...He has his mother to take care of him... He'll be okay."

"Lon'qu, I need you to go with Lissa."

"But..."

"You need to protect her and the children. What happens if they get attacked on the way? Lissa doesn't have a weapon. She can't fight off a horde of Risen by herself!"

"You have a lance! You can defend them if you go!"

"I'm not as strong as you are, Lon'qu. You need to be the one who goes with them. I know you won't fail." The man didn't seem convinced. "Please..." Sumia begged, tone growing soft. "I need you to do this for me."

Lon'qu's eyes darted from Sumia to Lissa and the children, and he gritted his teeth and grunted in annoyance. "Bah! Fine!" he growled, throwing his hands up in defeat. "We have to go, Lissa!"

"You can't think that, Lon'qu!" Lissa's voice was weak. "W...We all can go!"

"No! Did you hear her?" The man hoisted Owain into his arms and passed him into Lissa's free hand. He acted sure of himself, but he didn't sound at all like he believed a word of what he was saying. "She's the exalt. We need to do as she asks."

"Lon'qu..."

"We have to go now, woman!" He urged his wife and son into the passageway, and then turned back into the room.

"Lucina. Cynthia. You have to come with me."

"No! We don't want to!" the two girls cried at once, running over to Sumia and each taking a hold of one of her legs. "I won't let Mother go!" Lucina shouted defiantly.

Sumia knelt down and took both her daughters by the shoulders. Her voice was still calm, but Lucina could detect it shaking. "You have to," she said at last. "It's the only way that I can keep you safe."

"B...But Mommy..." Cynthia stuttered, tears welling up again in her large eyes.

"Don't cry, love," Sumia managed a smile, wiping Cynthia's eyes. "It's okay. I won't be gone for long. Only... a little while, and then I'll be back."

"But I don't want you gone at all! You need to come with us, Mother!" Lucina whimpered, lip quivering.

"I'm sorry, Lucina..." Her mother stared deep into her daughter's eyes, finding the Brand that shone in her left. "I need you to watch over your sister, okay? Do you think that you can do that for me?"

Lucina hesitated, tears building up, and then gave a slight nod.

"You remind me so much of your father. You'll be strong. I know you will." Sumia gave her a soft smile, and then pulled both of her daughters in tightly. "I love you so much." Lucina wanted her to stay there forever, but her mother released them and stood up tall. "Now go with Auntie Lissa and Uncle Lon'qu, okay?"

"O...Okay..."

Lon'qu stepped in and wrapped his arms around Cynthia to hoist the younger girl up. "Come, Lucina..." he spoke solemnly as he walked to meet up with his wife.

Lucina slowly followed him into the dark corridor, now only illuminated by Lissa's flickering lantern. Sumia trailed behind her up until the doorway, where she stopped and took hold of the bookshelf beside it.

"They're coming..." Sumia turned around quickly. "I can hear their footsteps. Get to the safe house. It shouldn't be far once you reach the end of the tunnel." She began to slide the bookcase back into place over the door.

"Wait, Mother!" Lucina suddenly shouted, and ran back to look at her face to face. "I...I still don't want you to go!"

"I'm not leaving forever, love. Just remember, your mother will always be there for you, even if I'm someplace very far away. Don't forget."

"Y...You'll be back right? You'll come back..."

"..."

"Mother?"

"...Yes, I will."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

"Lucina, quickly!" Lissa called to her. "We have to hurry!"

"I'm coming..." Lucina murmured as she turned her back on her mother and began to run over to her aunt. She heard the bookshelf being pushed further into place. Once it was shut, she wouldn't be able to see her mother again for a while... She froze, remembering exactly what her father had told her before he left for the last time, and then turned back around frantically. The bookshelf was almost closed. Her mother was almost gone.

"No! Wait, Mother!" she cried, running back to her again. "That's what Father said! He promised and he never came back!" Sumia was already so far away, and she didn't stop pushing the shelf. "I'll never see you again! Come back!" she wailed. "Please!" She was getting so close... Just a little further and she would make it...

Her uncle's hand grabbed her by the arm and stopped her in her tracks. "No! Let go of me! I need to see her again!" She thrashed around in a desperate attempt to free herself, but Lon'qu's grip held firm. Cynthia got frightened by her older sister's panic and started to cry again. The sound echoed down the dark hall somberly. She took a desperate glance at

the doorway and saw her mother's face. Sumia gave her one last warm smile, and Lucina saw a tear run down her cheek before she closed the door entirely, leaving her with only darkness. And she was gone.

Lucina burst into tears and tried to run at the door, but Lon'qu took her by the waist and hoisted her up onto his other shoulder. He started running down the corridor, following Lissa's lantern light. With every step, they were leaving her mother farther and farther behind. Lucina knew in her heart that she would never see her again, no matter how much she wished she could, but she didn't want to believe it. She reached back with her little hand, trying to grab something that wasn't there.

"Mother!"

Lucina awoke with a jolt, immediately throwing her blanket off her chest as she shot upward to a sitting position. Her nightgown was drenched with sweat, and she was breathing like she had just run to Ylisse and back. She looked around frantically, half expecting another fire to ignite or the ceiling to come crashing in on her, but she was alone in her tent. The night was quiet, but her ears were still ringing from explosions and screams.

Just a bad dream, Lucina reminded herself as she made an attempt to calm her racing heart. *Bad memory...* Her mother was still alive, and so was her father. They were sleeping in a tent not too far away if she needed them. They weren't under attack, nor were they in danger. *I get this all the time. I'm okay...*

She sat rigid for a few moments, and her own heavy breath was the only sound she could hear until a faint voice pierced through the darkness.

"Moth...I mean, Lucina? A...Are you okay? You sounded like you were having a nightmare..."

"...Morgan? Is that you?" Lucina was surprised to hear that she was still awake at this time of night.

"Yeah, it's me. Can I... come in?"

"O...Of course." Lucina hoisted herself out of bed and hurried over to the tent flap, opening it to find the girl still dressed in the same clothes as she had been wearing earlier. Her cowl was pulled over face and her head was hung low.

"Thanks, Lucina..." The girl spoke in barely a whisper as she walked inside.

"...Why did you call me Lucina?"

"B...Because I thought you didn't want to be my mother anymore..." Morgan whimpered. "So I didn't want to call you that..."

"Morgan... About that... I need to apolo-"

"I'm sorry, Mother!" Morgan suddenly cried out, unable to contain herself, as she threw off her cowl, revealing her bruised forehead and teary eyes. "It's my fault! I failed you!"

"W...What? What do you mean?"

"It's... my fault... I couldn't remember anything about you... and I made you feel like a bad mother!" Morgan choked in between sobs. "I've been trying so hard... to remember... but I can't! I just can't!"

"No! It isn't your fault at all!" Lucina hurriedly responded before noticing the girl's bruises. "Morgan, what happened to your head?" She reached up to brush away some of the girl's hair off her face. "It's all swollen!"

"I hit my head... really hard against a table..."

"Why on earth would you do something like that!?"

"I thought... I thought that it would make me remember something... but it didn't work and I failed you... I failed!" Morgan covered her face with her hands. "I'm so sorry!"

Immediately Sumia's words came back to her. *Your mother will always be there for you...* Oh gods...

"Morgan..." Lucina stepped forward and pulled the girl into a tight embrace, to which she accepted eagerly. "I never should have left... I'm the one who should be sorry."

"I... got a little carried away..." Morgan sniffed, attempting to stop her crying. "It's just... It's just that I know that I must have had so many happy memories with you, and now that I've lost them all... I realize how important it is for me to have

them... If I could have just one back... Anything back! There has to be something left in here!" She separated herself from Lucina and clutched her head again. "Because I know you were a great mother! There *had* to have been a million times when you played with me, or bandaged me up when I hurt myself, or tucked me in at night. I just know in my heart that you did all those things, but my head isn't giving me any evidence. I...I *need* those things!"

She looked tempted to whack her head against something again, but Lucina caught her by the arms. "It's okay," she soothed in her best impression of Sumia's calming tone. "You don't need to force it. It will all be okay." Morgan slowly fell silent, sniffing a few more times until Lucina spoke again. "Come on." She gestured towards her bed and sat the girl down before sitting herself.

"I'm so sorry for putting you through that, Morgan..." Lucina decided to start over. "A mother is always supposed to be there for her daughter, no matter what happens. All of those things I said, about me being a bad mother... I... made those up..." She looked at the girl beside her, trying to catch any glimpse of what she may be feeling. It was hard to read her face, especially in the low light, but she could see Morgan's eyes trained on her carefully. "There's just been so much that's happened recently. Me trying to cope with your father leaving, having to tell my parents about what happened, and then finding you... It was so unexpected. I just never thought that I would ever have a child, much less one that would come from the future like I did. ...So I panicked, and I lied to you about your father because I was afraid of what you might think of me if you knew the truth. I... didn't want you to hate me, because I know how awful it's like... to not have a father around."

Morgan listened closely but still did not speak, so Lucina continued. "But I knew from the moment that those words left my lips that you would only hate me more once you found out. I set you up for greater disappointment in the long run, which only lasted a few minutes anyways. I just couldn't bear to lie to you again, or make up some terrible excuse that would make it seem like I did the right thing by making your father leave. I miss him dearly, and you... you remind me of him so much, that when I saw the pain on your face when you learned the truth... I saw your father staring back at me when I made the mistake to try and take his life, and I knew I couldn't confront you. I made up that false excuse that I failed as a mother so I could leave, but now I realize that by coming up with that very excuse I've made it true. I thought I was doing what was best for you by leaving, because I was... afraid that I would do something else that would hurt you if I stayed, but me leaving was the thing that hurt you the most. You must have felt so alone..."

"When I woke up at first..." Morgan spoke softly. "And I couldn't find you anywhere, and I was scared. I thought that you had left me... because you didn't I...love me anymore. So when I found you, I was just so happy that you had come back and proven me wrong."

"Grandmother explained everything to me when you left," the girl continued after a short pause, staring down into her lap. "She told me about the world that you came from, why you came back in time, what she knew about your relationship with Father, and the kind of feelings you've been having. I guess I was just so excited to see you that I must have been really overwhelming, wasn't I?"

"I thought that was what I felt," Lucina replied. "But I think that you're just what I need right now. I...I haven't been myself recently, ever since your father left. I've been too emotional, too dramatic. Honestly it's been a little shameful." She frowned in self-disgust. "Then I found you, and when you smiled it made me want to smile too. And no matter how impossible it seemed, I just knew deep down that you were my daughter, and that I had to protect you with everything I had. I didn't trust what I felt at first, and I was selfish for leaving you when I should have been there. Even though we've only just met, you're very important to me... and I'm sorry that I made you feel like I felt otherwise..."

"I could never be mad at you, Mother. You're here now, right?"

"Yes, I am. And I won't try to leave again. The last thing that my mother told me before I lost her in the future was to be strong, and so I pledged to myself from then on that I needed to pursue strength to protect the people I loved, and that I could never show weakness to anyone. I needed to be the one who could give them hope, even when there was no hope left to give. I've forgotten about that pledge for the past few days. I promise I'll be strong for you."

"You don't have to be strong for me, Mother. No matter what you do, you'll still be my mother, no matter what."

"You're right. I don't *have* to, but I *want* to," Lucina smiled.

"As long as you stay with me, I don't care what you do," the girl's voice was noticeably happier than it had been before. "I just wish I had my memories back of you... I want to remember everything about you, everything that we did together. Even if there were times when you scolded me, I want to remember it all, but I can't remember a thing... I want to know what having a mother is like again."

Lucina thought for a moment in the silence that followed the girl's words. "Do you what your father said to me once? He told me that people like us can make our own happy memories for ourselves. Replace the memories that we've lost with

new ones. If you'd like, we could start all over. We could make the memories that you can't remember together, every last one."

"R...Really? Do you mean that, Mother?"

"I do," Lucina replied definitively. "Starting right now, we'll start making your memories one at a time, and I'll try to be the best mother that I can."

"You're already the best mother to me," Morgan told her, then let out a loud yawn. "But... do you think we can start tomorrow? I'm a little tired..."

"Of course. Whenever you want."

Instead of getting up to return to her own tent like Lucina expected, Morgan instead fell to her side, resting her head in Lucina's lap and closing her eyes. Not sure of how to react at first, Lucina was still, then eventually reached out with a gentle hand to stroke the girl's cobalt hair. Morgan sighed happily, squirming to find a better position before relaxing back into Lucina's legs. It was surprisingly comforting to Lucina as well, to know that the person who now depended on her was safe.

"Do you think Father will come back soon, Mother?" Morgan's voice was very quiet, and she kept her eyes closed.

"I hope so... There's nothing more that I want than to see him again, but I'm afraid of what he'll think of me when he does return..."

"Father won't hate you, Mother. I know him. He must love you very much."

Lucina didn't respond, thinking about what the girl said.

"What do you think he'll think of me? In this time, I guess he hasn't met me yet either."

"I'm sure he'll be thrilled. I've heard him say before that he's always wanted to have a child someday."

"I'm excited to see him again," she yawned faintly. "Good night, Mom," Morgan whispered into the silence.

"Good night, Morgan."

Lucina continued to brush her fingers through the girl's hair for a few minutes until she was sure that she was asleep, and then she gradually removed herself from underneath the girl's head. Lifting Morgan up slightly, Lucina repositioned her on the bed so that her head was resting on the pillow. She considered trying to remove the girl's coat, but she figured that it would wake her, and she seemed content enough with it on. Lucina pulled her blanket up to Morgan's shoulders, and then watched it rise and fall with the girl's steady breath for a few moments before leaning down to give her a light kiss on the forehead.

She did say she wanted to be tucked in at night, Lucina thought with a smile as she quietly walked over to the small chair in the corner of the tent and sat down. Shifting herself around until she was more comfortable, Lucina found herself drifting off to sleep as well. The nightmare didn't come back.

Yay, not a sad ending to a chapter for once! I've been excited to write this scene between Lucina and Morgan for quite a while actually! I think it's about time that we move away from the melodrama for a bit to add some family fluff into this story.

I know that Morgan canonically doesn't really get distressed about that much, but in this story I plan to make her a little more rounded emotionally, specifically because I want to make her actually care about where she came from and I also want to focus on her relationship with Lucina. She really does want to get to know her mother better and spend more time with her, and I figured that she would adopt a relatively more serious outlook when she's around Lucina, who's also quite serious.

Just because there were a few people who got the wrong idea, Lucina didn't leave the last chapter because she was like "Well I have a kid now I'm too good for this so I'm out." When she said that she didn't deserve to be Morgan's mother, she meant that Morgan deserved someone better than her, because she honestly wants to be the best mother that she can be and thought that by making Robin leave and lying to her that she was "unworthy" almost of being a role model for someone as nice and happy as Morgan. She kind of knew that to not be true though all along, as was hopefully described in her dialogue with Morgan.

I said that there would be another little Lucina scene quite a while ago, didn't I? It's a sad one, but hopefully it made some of Lucina's motives and views on both her own mother and now being a mother herself a little clearer. Once Chrom died, I figured Lucina would become much more attached to her mother than before, and that's why the role of mother is so important to her. Because of her own experiences, she now wants to do everything she can to give Morgan what she was deprived of from a very young age. She doesn't want to see the same thing happen to Morgan that happened to her, and in her initial panic of finding Morgan she just briefly forgot about this memory. Losing Sumia was also the reason why Lucina decided to be strong, stoic, and repressive of her emotions. Also, if you remember, this is why Lucina got all emotional when Sumia was talking to her in Chapter 11 and couldn't look in her eyes - because unknowingly Sumia in the present told her the same exact thing, that she would always be there for her even when she was far away, that Sumia in the future told Lucina right before she said goodbye for the last time.

Determined and hopeful Lucina is back though! She's done with just being all depressed like she has the last few chapters, and now she's going to devote her energy to being there for Morgan! We're going to see just how Lucina plans to follow Robin's advice from the first chapter and create some happy memories for Morgan next chapter!

***Chapter 16*: The Art of the Sword**

In which Lucina and Morgan get an early start and begin to craft memories together

Chapter 16 – The Art of the Sword

Lucina's eyes sleepily opened to find the rays of the morning sun softly illuminating her tent's interior. It was a pleasant surprise, for very rarely did she sleep through the night. Too often her mind took a journey through time while her body rested, forcing her to relive the most painful memories from her childhood. Most nights Lucina would lie awake in bed for hours, exhausted from the previous day's trials but too afraid to experience the horror she would see when she closed her eyes.

Slowly lifting herself out of the chair, Lucina let out a small yawn and stretched her arms high over her head for a moment before letting them drop to her sides. She shuffled over to her bedside where Morgan was still sound asleep. The girl's arms and legs were sprawled out in odd positions and the blankets were in jumbled heaps on her chest; however, her expression was calm and peaceful, showing no sign of having any nightmares herself.

"Morgan," she whispered, keeping her voice as soft as she could.

No response. Lucina bent down and gently pushed some of her daughter's hair off her face, rubbing her forehead. "Morgan," she tried again slightly louder.

The girl's eyelids twitched and she closed her agape mouth into a childish pout. Without waking up, she gave a tired groan. "Hmm?"

"It's time to get up, Morgan. It's morning."

Morgan groaned again and rolled to her side, pulling one of the blankets over her head. "Five more minutes, Mother..."

"Okay then," Lucina withdrew her hand and stood up. "When you're ready to work on your memories, just let me know."

The girl's eyes opened wide and she sat upright, immediately alert. "Oh my gosh, you're right!" she exclaimed excitedly, trying to untangle her limbs from the sheets. "We can't do anything together if I'm asleep! Why didn't you wake me earlier, Mother? What did I miss?"

"Nothing yet. I just woke up myself."

"Good," Morgan calmed down slightly, rubbing her eyes. "What are we going to do first?"

"Well, unless there's something that you really want to do, I think I have an idea."

"Then we have to get started right now!" The girl swung herself out of bed and was on her feet in seconds, grabbing Lucina's hand to pull her out of the tent. "Come on, Mother!"

"I sort of have to get dressed first, Morgan..." Lucina looked down at her nightclothes apologetically.

"Oh yeah..." Morgan paused to look Lucina over briefly, and then burst into laughter. "Sorry! I was just so excited to start! I should probably get dressed too." It took her a few moments to realize that she hadn't changed since yesterday. "Haha, just kidding! I don't have to!"

"How about you grab some breakfast while I put on my regular clothes?" Lucina opened the tent flap for the girl to step out. "Then you can meet me back here."

"Sure thing, Mother! I'll be back as fast as I can!" Morgan took off into a run, but stopped mid-stride and turned back around. "Wait, do you want me to get you anything? I can make you something to eat too!"

"You don't have to, Morgan. I can grab something later," Lucina waved her off.

"Okay then! I'll see what I can do!" The girl raised her hand to her forehead to give Lucina a little salute before heading towards the mess tent, calling "Don't start without me!" behind her.

Lucina couldn't help but smile as she retreated back inside her tent and closed it so she could change in privacy. Morgan's excitement was already rubbing off on her, and eagerly she slipped on her usual outfit and strapped Falchion to her hip to get ready. Stepping outside herself, Lucina took a deep breath of the fresh air and allowed the morning sun

to warm her skin until Morgan returned.

She didn't have to wait long, for in mere minutes the girl reappeared down the path. Still locked in a full sprint, Morgan held a book in one hand, a plate of food in the other, and a full piece of buttered toast wedged in between her teeth. She skidded to a halt in front of Lucina, shifting the book underneath her arm so that she could take a bite of her bread. "I'm ready, Mother!" she exclaimed with mouth half-full.

"Not with all those crumbs over your face, I hope," Lucina laughed.

Morgan grinned, wiping her chin with one of the sleeves of her coat before holding the plate of food out to Lucina. "I got you some breakfast, Mother! I didn't know what you liked, so I just got you a little bit of everything."

"Thank you, Morgan..." Lucina took the plate in both hands. "You didn't have to get this for me."

"No problem! We're going to need all the energy we can get for the exciting day we're going to have!"

Lucina wasn't that hungry, but nevertheless she took a few bites so Morgan wouldn't worry that her generosity wasn't appreciated. The girl proceeded to finish her toast, making sure this time that weren't any crumbs left on her face before speaking.

"So what are we going to do first, Mother?"

Lucina started walking down the path, motioning for Morgan to follow her. "I was thinking that we could practice some swordplay," she replied, then immediately began to doubt her decision. "Or we don't have to if you don't want to. I guess that training isn't really the most fun thing that we could do, but I'm afraid I don't have many other pastimes..."

"That sounds so cool, Mother! There's no way that anything you do couldn't be interesting," Morgan reassured, looking thrilled. "Even if we're just sitting around and not doing anything, I would be happy that we were together."

Lucina smiled and let out a relieved sigh that her daughter didn't consider her to be boring. "Okay then, I'm excited to get started. The training grounds are right over there." She singled out the arms tent and guided the girl inside.

"There are so many different kinds of weapons in here," Morgan gazed around in wonder, weaving in and out of metal racks that held an assortment of lances and axes. "Oh, look!" She pointed at a shelf near one of the back walls and hurried over to it. "Look at all the tomes! I could use some of these!" The girl pulled out a stack of the magical books to examine them more closely. "This Bolganone spell is much more powerful than the Elfire tome I have," she murmured to herself. "I wonder if I could handle using it. I bet Father would be proud of me if I did." She put the tome back on the shelf, holding up the next one in the pile for Lucina to see. "Hey, Mother! Look! It's an Arcthunder tome! Doesn't Father use lightning magic a lot?"

"Hmm? Yes, he does," Lucina replied distractedly. "Morgan... Could you come over here? I need to fit you with a sword first before we can start."

"Right!" Morgan stuffed the rest of the tomes she was carrying back into the shelf and hurried over to Lucina's side.

"Here, try this one." Lucina removed a broadsword from its place on the weapon rack, gripping the hilt with two hands and taking a few practice swings in front of her before handing it to Morgan. "It might be a little heavy though..."

True to her assumption, as soon as Morgan took the sword in her hands she wasn't able to hold it up at first. With a great amount of effort, she lifted the weapon up in front of her and tried to take a practice swing like Lucina had, but immediately lost her balance and dropped the sword again.

"Right, too heavy," Lucina nodded, taking the blade from her and hoisting it back up onto the rack.

"No, wait Mother! I can do it!"

"It's okay," Lucina reassured, already focused on trying to find another weapon. "I should have recognized that a broadsword would be too heavy for you. I'll try and find something a little lighter." She scanned through blades of varying sizes, picking one up occasionally to test its weight before finding one that seemed light enough. "How about this one?"

The girl eagerly took the blade from her, relieved that she was able to hold it up this time. She then tried imitating a few of Lucina's swings from a moment ago, looking rather content with herself. "How was that, Mother? I think I like this one."

Lucina frowned and put her hand to her chin, carefully studying every aspect of the girl's motions. "Morgan, could you hold the blade straight in front of you for me?"

"A...Am I not doing it right?"

"No, I just need to see something," Lucina told her. She then took a few steps backwards as Morgan slowly raised the sword so that it was parallel with the ground. Lucina looked at her intensely before giving her final decision. "The weight might be better, but the blade is too short. You won't be able to keep your foes at an advantageous distance with it." She walked back over and plucked the weapon from her daughter's hands, returning it amongst the others. "A sword has to be an extension of your arm," she explained, unsheathing Falchion so that she could demonstrate. "Swinging it has to feel natural, as if the blade is a part of you that you can manipulate at will. If it doesn't fit your stature perfectly, it will be clumsy or ineffective to use. Does that make sense?" She glanced over at Morgan again, who was furiously scribbling with a quill in the book she had brought with her. "Morgan? What are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm taking notes!" the girl exclaimed, not looking up from her writing. "I want to learn everything I can from you, so I need to make sure I get it all down. Now what was that part about a sword being part of your arm? I want to get it word-for-word."

"You don't have to take notes, Morgan. Trust me: you'll know when you've found the right sword for you as soon as you pick it up. It sounds a little strange, but you'll understand what I mean."

"Okay..." Morgan seemed hesitant to tuck the book away, but did so upon her mother's request. "I'll try to look for one too then!" She immediately began to pick up every sword one by one, eager to put Lucina's words to the test.

Lucina gave a small laugh at the girl's quite literal interpretation of what she had said, watching her dart through the racks for a few moments before turning to look for a suitable blade herself.

"Mother!" Morgan exclaimed excitedly after a minute of searching. "I think I found it! I feel good about this one!"

"Is that so?" Lucina was surprised to hear from her so quickly. "Let's have a look."

Morgan presented her finding with both hands, holding the sword out for her mother to see. It was a very traditionally designed steel blade of average size; nothing particularly out of the ordinary, but reliable and easy to wield nonetheless. Lucina held the sword up, weighing it relative to Falchion in her hand before slowly cleaving through the air with it a few times. "It seems promising to me," she said as she returned the weapon to Morgan's hands. "But the real test is how it fits *you*. Can you take a few swings for me?"

Morgan again made an attempt to copy Lucina's moves and was much more successful than she had been before. "How do I look, Mother? Is this one okay?" She glanced at Lucina expectantly, and her smile grew wide as Lucina started to nod her head in agreement.

"That's the one," Lucina spoke at last. "Does it feel natural to use?"

"Yeah, it's just like you said, Mother! I picked it up and swung it around a few times, and it felt like the blade was weightless in my hands. Almost like it had always been attached to arm!"

"Perfect. That's exactly the feeling I was trying to describe. Do you think you're ready to start practicing?" Lucina asked.

"I'm always ready, Mother!" Morgan held the blade at her side confidently. "Am I going to get to learn all of your cool moves? Like the ones that you used yesterday to save me from those monsters?"

"We'll see what we can get to today. We may need to start with the basics before we can actually start sparring," Lucina reasoned as a thought came up in her mind. "Speaking of showing you things, I wonder whether or not my future self taught you proper swordplay. I don't think I would have been remiss in training you to fight... Are you sure you don't remember anything about using a sword? Anything at all?"

Morgan frowned in annoyance as she tried to recover any sort of memory, but came up with nothing. "No... I'm sorry that I can't recall anything for you, Mother. Maybe if I try extra hard..." She gritted her teeth and clutched the sword in her hands tightly. Her face looked distressed and was beginning to show lines of strain.

"Calm, Morgan," Lucina gently placed her hand on the girl's shoulder. "You don't have to force it. We can start all over, remember? We'll make those memories again, even if we have to relearn everything I may have taught you."

"A...are you sure? You must have so many other things that you have to do every day, Mother. Is it okay if you spent all that time with me? I don't want to be a bother to you if I have to learn *everything* again..." Morgan held her head low in shame.

"What happened to all that enthusiasm from before?" Lucina gave her a warm smile and tousled her hair. "You aren't a bother to me. There's nothing that I would rather do right now than spend time with you."

"Aw... Thanks," Morgan perked up. "And what am I talking about?" She began speaking in her usual, more confident voice. "I love learning new things! And maybe... maybe you'll teach me something new that you never did before where I came from! What do I do first, Mother? I'll be your most devoted student!"

"Well, when it comes to training, safety always takes top priority," Lucina instructed. "We won't be able to use that exact sword that you picked out, at least for now while you're still learning."

"But I thought this sword was *the* sword..." Morgan said confusedly, holding the blade in her hands. "Weren't we just looking all this time for the perfect sword to practice with?"

"The perfect sword to *fight* with," Lucina corrected. "I wanted to find the most natural fit for a real sword first. Now that I know what blade works for you, I can find a practice sword that fits almost the exact dimensions and weight as the one you have. You'll use the real sword that you picked out in an actual battle, but practice swords are safer and will prevent unnecessary injury."

"Oh, okay. That makes sense."

"I'll get a practice sword myself as well. I don't think Falchion will be very forgiving when it comes to inflicting injury..." Lucina reassured as she sorted through a crate of training weapons. Removing one for herself that she recognized immediately as similar to Falchion's build, she then withdrew another that seemed to match the blade Morgan had chosen. "How's this one?"

The girl took the weapon from her and tried a few experimental swings, mentally comparing the two swords in the process. "Wow... You're really good at this, Mother! This one is almost exactly alike and you got it right on your first try! What's your secret? I just have to know!"

"No secret," Lucina chuckled, retrieving the practice sword she picked out for herself. "Just a little skill that I've become proficient in after handling swords all the time. It's not really that useful of an ability actually, but it can be helpful in certain scenarios like these."

"Well I think it's cool," Morgan insisted, trailing behind Lucina as they walked outside behind the arms tent to the training grounds. "It's like you have a personal, built-in scale, but for weighing swords... Oh! Wait!" The girl paused in her tracks, becoming very excited as she started firing off a myriad of questions. "Is that something that you taught Father? He says something about scales too sometimes, doesn't he? Is that what he means? B...because if you taught him, you just have to teach me too!"

"I think that's more of a tactician thing," Lucina considered as she prepared a training dummy. "If my memory serves me correct, I believe that he said something like that a few times in one day without realizing it. My father teased him about it, so now it's sort of become a joke between them." She smiled upon recalling some of Robin's and her father's constant yet good-natured banter.

"Are Father and Grandfather good friends? They seem like they're very close from what I've heard."

"I've never encountered a friendship quite like theirs before," Lucina admitted. "They've done so much together that they could probably finish each other's sentences if they wanted to."

"That's nice," Morgan sighed blissfully. "Our family just sounds so wonderful."

"It does sound that way, doesn't it?" Lucina mused as she finished preparing, and then she was reminded of her guilt that never seemed to fade away. "I'm sorry that your father isn't around, Morgan... It would be so much nicer for you if he were here..."

The girl recognized the look on her mother's face and was quick to try and cheer her up. "Don't worry, Mother! Father will be back really soon! I can feel it! I don't know *why* I know, but I just... know. "

"I hope you're right," Lucina murmured, and then tried to change the subject so she wouldn't dwell on the problem for long. "So anyways, are you ready to begin the lesson?"

"Mom's Swordfighting School is now in session!" Morgan grinned.

"Okay, how about we see what you know first so we can figure out what you need to learn. Why don't you try assuming a battle stance for me?"

Morgan looked down at her blade, and then shifted her gaze towards Lucina in concern. "But what if I mess up? I might not do it how you want..."

"That's okay. I'm just curious to see how you approach it, that's all. Then we can work from there."

"Here it goes..." Morgan bent her knees slightly, keeping her right foot stationary underneath her body while widening her stance for balance with her left leg. Keeping her arms bent and close to her chest, she positioned her grip on the hilt so that the back of her right hand was facing outward, while her left hand did the opposite. She brought the blade close to her face and kept the tip pointed straight in front of her. "H...How's this, Mother?" Morgan stammered.

Lucina could hardly believe it; the pose was all too similar. "You... That's my stance..." She took a few steps closer to examine Morgan's form more carefully. "You have my stance," she repeated in astonishment. "The way you hold your blade, your foot placement... Even your elbows are angled exactly like I do..." Lucina assumed the stance herself, allowing Morgan to compare between them.

"I...It is!" Morgan's eyes brightened with confidence. "I just did what you said and tried whatever came to me! Even though I couldn't remember, I...I naturally did it just like you! I knew it!" She dropped the stance for a moment in excitement, but then quickly reassumed it for fear she might forget how. "I just knew it! You did teach me things in my future! See? You are a good mother!"

"Maybe I wasn't as bad as I thought. Let's see what else I taught you," Lucina urged, finding herself growing almost as excited as her daughter. She dropped her own stance and stepped a few arm lengths in front of Morgan, holding her sword vertically in front of her. "From that stance, try to hit my blade with a horizontal slice."

Morgan seemed a little hesitant. "Are you sure that's a good idea, Mother? I know your stance, but what if I hit you by mistake when I attack? Should we start with a target first?" She gestured at the training dummy that Lucina had taken out.

"I set that up because I thought we would have to start from scratch, but I get the feeling that you'll do just fine," Lucina spoke surely. "Don't worry about hitting me. I'll parry your strike."

"If you say so, Mother..." Morgan held her stance for a moment, then lunged forward, her blade striking Lucina's with a sharp clash of metal.

"Good. Try to bend your knees a little more. It will give your swing more power when you release that energy," Lucina instructed. Morgan did as she was told, crouching slightly lower before executing another sideways swing into Lucina's waiting sword. "Did you feel the difference?"

"Yeah, that felt much better," Morgan nodded, reassuming Lucina's stance in preparation for another attack.

Lucina turned her blade sideways so that it was parallel to the ground. "Now try a vertical chop. Hold your sword behind you, and then swing it over your head to strike your target. It should be a clean arc, and you need to strike with the very edge of the blade. You want to minimize air resistance with every attack."

"Right." The girl slowly brought her sword behind her as Lucina had said. Taking a second to shift her grip so that the blade wouldn't strike diagonally and miss, she swung her weapon over her head and clashed it against Lucina's.

"Your technique is impressive," Lucina commented in approval, holding her weapon steady. "Again!"

Lucina kept her going to warm up, eventually instructing her to begin mixing sequences of both horizontal and vertical slices.

"That's it! From the right, then chain your attack together with one from the left!"

"Keep your blade closer!"

Aside from a few minor issues with form or hand placement that she corrected, Lucina was amazed with Morgan's abilities. Even though the girl didn't actually remember learning anything about swordplay, she properly executed every move that Lucina instructed her to make.

"Do you feel warmed up? I think that you're ready," Lucina lowered her blade to her side.

"Ready... for what?" Morgan huffed, gradually catching her breath.

"To spar with me, of course."

"What?" Morgan exclaimed in surprise. "F...fight you? Already? But... but you're so good, and I just started! I don't think I'm good enough yet to even try!"

"I think you're underestimating your abilities. I get the feeling that this isn't the first time that you've fought with a sword, don't you?"

"Well, yeah... But I'm still nowhere near as skillful as you are, Mother."

"Let's test that theory then," Lucina smiled and assumed her battle stance. "Don't worry. I'll take it slow at first, and you can let me know whenever you want to stop."

"There's just so much to think about..." Morgan protested, looking uneasy. "There's my stance, my hand height, the angle that I swing at... And then to top it all off I have to focus on not getting hit by any of your swings either! I knew I should have taken notes... I'm going to forget everything that you just taught me!"

"I think that you're going to remember because I don't think you ever forgot," Lucina insisted. "Just trust your feelings and you'll be fine. I promise."

"I...If you think I can do it, then I'll try!" Morgan's characteristic enthusiasm returned once again and she assumed her fighting stance.

Lucina made the first move, being sure to keep her attack simplistic and dragged out so that Morgan would easily see it coming. Like she expected, the girl instinctively parried her strike with ease, following up with a horizontal slash of her own. Lucina deflected the blow and swung her weapon diagonally downwards. Morgan sidestepped to the right, again attempting the same sideways attack in hopes for greater success. Lucina countered the blade once more and took a step backwards, allowing the girl to try one more strike. Changing tactics, Morgan instead attempted an overhead swing exactly like she had been taught. However, she hesitated as she brought the blade down close to her mother's head, which allowed Lucina to slip into attacking range. The girl tried to block Lucina's attack, but her recovery was too slow to prevent her mother's weapon from coming within centimeters of her chest. Lucina held her blade steady, and neither of them moved for a moment until Morgan yielded.

"You're just too strong for me, Mother," she sighed, dropping her stance and holding her arms limply at her sides.

"I don't think you were trying as hard as you could have. You're holding back. I can tell. It's making your movements rigid and is preventing you from adapting your attacks to the battle. Where's the flow that I was seeing when we were warming up?" Lucina questioned.

"It's because you're my mother..." Morgan looked ashamed that she couldn't live up to Lucina's expectations. "I just don't want to mess up and hurt you by accident..."

"Morgan," Lucina softened her tone and put a hand on the girl's shoulder. "I know you won't let that happen. If there was anything that my future self must have taught you, it was technique and precision, and I can see it in your form. I think you're better than you realize, and I'm not just saying that as your mother, but as a fellow swordfighter." She paused, remembering the intention of the lesson in the first place, and added, "Don't feel like I'm pressuring you to do this though. I won't be angry if you want to stop. This was just meant to be something that I thought we could do together for your memories, but if this isn't enjoyable we can find something else to try."

"No way! I'm having a great time!" Morgan was quick to respond. "I just wanted to be perfect for you, so a master swordswoman like yourself wouldn't have such an embarrassment of a daughter..."

"I could never be embarrassed by you," Lucina reassured. "I wouldn't even call myself a master at swordplay either. I still have much to learn and always have room for improvement, so don't you worry about messing up." Lucina let go of the girl's shoulder and assumed her fighting stance once more. "If it helps, try thinking of me not as your mother in the middle of the duel, but as your sparring partner," she suggested. "Don't hold back this time. I want to see what Ylisse's first ever princess tactician can really do."

Morgan smiled at the mention of the title she had bestowed upon herself yesterday, and followed suit with a ready pose of her own. "I won't hold back, Mother! I'll make you proud!"

"Then let us begin!"

This round Morgan took the offensive first, and instead of only resorting to the few they had practiced, she began to use a more natural combination of swings. Within a few moments, she had significantly decreased the delay between her attacks that she had suffered from earlier. Lucina tried to ease back her own strikes, but she found it increasingly difficult with the sudden pressure the girl was placing on her. The time that she spent blocking her daughter's hits was growing much larger proportionally than the time she spent attacking herself, and Lucina loved it.

Morgan was subconsciously identifying the weak points in Lucina's defenses and altering her own strategy to aim there. Lucina realized that the girl had even more experience than she expected: the ability to determine your opponents' vulnerabilities mid-battle was a developed skill, and Morgan was excelling at it. Instead of allowing herself to be beaten, Lucina instead began to raise the intensity, pushing the girl harder for a true test of her abilities. Morgan cut back attacking in order to counter Lucina's quicker strikes, but still managed to match her mother's rate.

The clash of metal striking metal rang out more and more frequently as Lucina continued to speed up. Morgan was beginning to tire but she refused to back down. The duel continued for a few more moments until the sound suddenly ceased altogether. Both stood still, with mother's blade just barely halted at daughter's shoulder.

"Darn... You beat me again..." Morgan groaned, relaxing her arms. "How was I that time, Mother? Was I better?"

"Were you better?" A wide smile stretched across Lucina's face. "You were fantastic!"

"Really? I...I was that good? Even though I lost?"

"You were listening to your instincts perfectly, and look how much of a difference that made! I wasn't able to win easily you know. I even worked up a sweat," Lucina praised, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. "And you use so many of my moves that it was like I was fighting myself. I haven't gotten that excited about a swordfight in a long time."

"I wouldn't have been able to do it without your support, Mom!" Morgan beamed.

"You know," Lucina began. "After that performance, I'm interested to see if you can wield my blade."

"You mean Falchion? But... but Falchion is really special, right? Grandfather told me that not just anyone can use it."

"Correct. Falchion can only be wielded by those it considers to be worthy. For the people it chooses, the blade will remain forever sharp and can cleave through most materials with ease. Otherwise, its edges will dull and it becomes practically unusable," Lucina explained, unsheathing the sword so Morgan could get a better glimpse of it. "Those chosen few are only members of the Exalted bloodline, which is why my father and I can use it. You too are a descendent of the Hero King, so it's very possible that you can wield Falchion as well."

"Wow..." Morgan gazed at the blade in awe. "Do you really think that I can use it?"

"Judging from the match we just had, I do," Lucina nodded. "But there's only one way to know for sure." She held the sword out the girl ceremoniously.

Morgan slowly reached out to take it, but her hands faltered before she touched it. "Are you sure it's okay, Mother?"

"I'm sure. Now go on," Lucina urged.

The girl wrapped both hands around Falchion's hilt, lifting it from Lucina's. She held it cautiously with her arms outstretched, as if she was carrying a dangerous animal that would bite her the moment she brought it close to her body.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't want to break it or anything!" Morgan's voice was tinted with fear. "T...That would be really bad!"

"I wouldn't worry about that," Lucina laughed. "Falchion can never break. That's another one of its special qualities."

"That's a relief," the girl relaxed slightly. "What do you want me to do with it, Mother?"

Lucina glanced around, searching for something that would be an easy target to hit. "There," she pointed at a small fallen tree, motioning for Morgan to follow her. "How about this log? Why don't you try cutting it straight down the middle?"

"I can try," Morgan replied uneasily, standing a short distance away from her target and assuming Lucina's battle stance. "D...do you mind standing a little farther away, Mother? Just in case," she asked, voice cautious.

"Of course," Lucina agreed, stepping backwards slightly to give the girl more space. She watched eagerly as Morgan took a few deep breaths to prepare herself, wrapping her fingers so tightly around the hilt of the sword that they were turning white. She held it ready behind her, taking a very long look at her target. After a few tense seconds, Morgan clenched her teeth and immediately released her energy, swinging Falchion over her head in a blur.

"Hyah!"

Lucina heard the thud of the blade striking the ground, and she hurried over to Morgan's side. She was completely silent,

and Lucina immediately understood why. The tip of the blade rested right in front of the log, slightly embedded in the soft dirt, and the log had not been cut.

"Not even a scratch..." Lucina murmured. She turned back to the girl, who had dropped the sword to the ground and was hopelessly trying to conceal her disappointment.

"I...I couldn't do it... But that's o...okay, right? I guess I'm just not one of those special people..." She attempted a nervous laugh, but it was clear she was terribly upset. "I'm s...sorry, Mother..."

"Oh, Morgan," Lucina sighed softly. "It's okay. Not all of the Exalted bloodline can wield Falchion. Cynthia can't, and neither can Lissa or Owain. It isn't just you."

"B...But you can, and s...so can Grandfather. Why can't I?" Morgan's lip was quivering, and she was desperately resisting the urge to cry. "Am I n...not good enough? Am I unworthy of b...being your daughter?"

Lucina pulled the girl into a tight embrace. "Morgan, nothing can change the fact that you're my daughter," she spoke gently to comfort her. "And I don't need a sword to tell me that you're special."

"T...Thanks, Mom," Morgan sniffed. "You always know how to make me feel better."

"It's what a mother does, isn't it?" Lucina smiled. "I'll do my best to be there for you whenever you need me, okay?"

"Right!" Morgan returned her mother's smile. "I'm happy we got to spend this time together, Mother. I hope all my memories with you will be just as wonderful."

"I hope so too," Lucina agreed, bending down and retrieving Falchion to return to its sheath.

"Maybe I just have to try harder if I want to use your sword," Morgan wondered out loud, becoming optimistic. "If that's the case, then I challenge you to another duel, Mother!" she exclaimed, pointing at Lucina definitively. "I'm definitely going to beat you this time! I can feel it!"

"We'll see about that, now won't we?"

Mother-daughter bonding time! And what better way for Lucina to connect with Morgan than with sword training?

In the game, Morgan has both an Elfire tome and a Steel Sword in her inventory if she's a Tactician as her base class, which happens to be the case with Lucina as her mother because Lucina can't pass down the Lord class (but she should though). Anyways, this chapter is why I didn't give Morgan a sword in the Ruins of Time, because otherwise Lucina would have found out too early how Morgan fights with one! Even though Morgan doesn't remember knowing how to use a sword, when placed in a combat situation she can subconsciously recall a battle style that Lucina recognizes all too well...

Morgan certainly hasn't forgotten her father's trademark catchphrase though! Because I doubt that the Robin of this story shouts "Time to tip the scales!" every time he attacks, I decided to turn the phrase into more of a running joke between Robin and Chrom. I expect that the two were in a tactics meeting sometime and Robin just happened to say something along the lines of "tipping the scales" or "the scales would be tipped in our favor" a few times over without even realizing that he was doing it. As we know Chrom all too well, he was quick to capitalize on *that* opportunity and started making fun of him for it, albeit good-naturedly. Robin found it annoying at first, but eventually just decided to play along with the joke and will occasionally shout something overdramatically about tipping the scales whenever Chrom is around. Let's just say that Chrom finds it incredibly funny every time, and may or may not start giggling like a child even during battle.

Just in case you were wondering, Cynthia as Lucina's sister technically *can* use the Falchion, but neither Lucina nor Cynthia actually knows that from the support! That's why Lucina says she can't. Only Chrom sees the log cut in half, and even then he doesn't know who did it. I can tell you though that the log in this story most definitely was not cut.

I know we've been Robin-less for a while, but don't anybody start worrying! He's due for his return quite soon!

Also, this story has hit over 100 favorites as well as over 100 followers, so I want to express my gratitude to all you readers out there! You guys really keep me motivated to keep on writing new chapters every week, and I'll try to get back to my usual every Sunday schedule this weekend! I also want to take this time to thank the people who reviewed this story as guests, because I can't respond to you guys any other way! Thanks again!

Chapter 17: Familial Bonds

Make sure that you've seen Chapter 16 first before this one! My posting schedule has been a day or two off recently, so just check to see that you're all caught up with reading!

In which Morgan convinces her mother to go to dinner and Lucina gets embarrassed

Chapter 17 – Familial Bonds

"Look, Mother! Everyone is walking to the middle of camp! It must be dinnertime!" Morgan excitedly pointed in the direction of the dining tent.

"Dinner? Already?" Lucina glanced over at the horizon for confirmation, and sure enough the sun was close to disappearing behind the distant trees. "I hadn't even noticed how late it was..." She stood up from the crate that she had been sitting on and scratched her head, finding the time difficult to comprehend. "Have we been here all day?"

"Yeah, we must have! The hours sure slip away when we're having such a great time, don't they?"

"It seems like it should be noon at the latest," Lucina said, taking another glance at the sun just to confirm once again that it was indeed evening. "Sorry, Morgan... I didn't even stop us for a lunch break."

"That's right... We didn't have lunch..." Morgan slowly nodded, just realizing the fact for herself. "Wait, we haven't had anything to eat since breakfast! I'm starving!" At the very mention of the word, the girl's stomach let out a low moan, and then she burst into laughter. "Haha! See? My stomach thinks so too!"

"So it does," Lucina smiled. "You should probably get over to the mess tent and satisfy its hunger before it gets angry."

"Right!" Morgan took a few steps towards camp before realizing that Lucina wasn't following her, and she turned back around. "What are you waiting for, Mother? Aren't you coming with me?"

"No, I'm just fine, Morgan," Lucina replied, bending over to retrieve her practice sword. "You go on without me. I'll stay here to clean up."

"No way! You can't stay here while everyone else eats! You've gotta be as hungry as I am! You barely ate any of your breakfast."

"I'm used to it," Lucina murmured, picking up Morgan's sword and placing both back into the crate with all the others. "We weren't always able to find something to eat for days in the future. Most of the crops had all been killed during Grima's invasion of the continent, and the soil was so dry that we couldn't plant new ones." She winced, recalling the terrible memories. "Even when my friends and I did find a small supply of food, no matter how hungry I was, I ate only what I needed to stay alive. There were other people, other survivors, who needed it more than I did."

She turned away so Morgan would be able to judge the expression on her face. "There were little children," she spoke, voice almost a whisper. "They were so weakened by hunger that they could barely stand. And every time we returned to one of the few safe places we had left, I would see the desperation in their parents' sullen eyes when they couldn't feed their starving children. They were just about to give up hope... I... I couldn't let that happen. I gave everything I had to them... Even if they were so sick that they couldn't be saved..." She cleared her throat loudly, assuming a more confident voice. "So I'm used to going without food for long periods of time. You don't have to worry about me."

Lucina felt Morgan's arms slowly wrap around her from behind, and the girl rested her head on Lucina's back. "I'm sorry, Mother," the girl spoke softly. "Everything that you've had to go through sounds so sad... But at least we have each other now, right?" she asked innocently, reminding Lucina of how young the girl still was.

"Yes, we do," Lucina turned around to run her fingers through Morgan's hair. "I shouldn't trouble you with these things. Nothing good can come from knowing them."

"That's okay. It helps me understand the kind of person you are, Mother," Morgan sighed. "But you have to eat! You can't save the world if you're so hungry that you don't have any energy left! No one will think poorly of you if you go and have dinner with everyone else. We have enough food for everyone!"

"...You're right. I'll come if you want me to," Lucina agreed after a moment of thought.

"Yay!" Morgan beamed and tugged on Lucina's arm. "C'mon, let's go right now!"

"Alright. I just have to clean up everything we moved."

"We can do that later, Mother!" Morgan pulled harder. "We have to get there soon before all the seats are taken so can we can sit next to each other!"

"I'm coming," Lucina smiled and shook her head in defeat, allowing the girl to drag her all the way to the dining tent.

As soon as they entered, Lucina felt all of the Shepherds' eyes turn to them. It was just what she had feared would be the result after what had happened in the Ruins of Time. None of them actually addressed her directly, but she could hear fragments of their hushed conversations.

"She never said she had a daughter..."

"She made Robin leave, didn't she?"

"Why would she do that?"

Lucina's cheeks flushed in embarrassment, yet she pretended not to notice that everyone was talking about her. She felt the sudden urge to leave, but knew that she couldn't abandon Morgan in front of the entire army again. Morgan would get the wrong idea that she didn't want to be with her, and seeing that look of devastation on her face a second time would be far worse than any gossip Lucina would have to endure.

"There, Mother! There's a whole bunch of open seats!" Morgan hurried over and sat down in one before someone else could even think about claiming it, and then she pat the chair next to her. "Here you go!"

"Thank you, Morgan." Lucina slid into the chair and tried to seem as casual as she could to not attract any more attention to herself.

"What's the matter?" Morgan asked confusedly, cocking her head to the side. "You're all stiff, Mother." She was completely oblivious to all the other people who were watching them.

"Hmm? Oh, nothing! Nothing's the matter. Everything's good," Lucina replied, not wanting to make her daughter aware of the situation so it wouldn't bother her. To make her point, Lucina tried giving a weak smile and relaxing her shoulders more. "I'm fine."

"Good," Morgan seemed relieved, then stood up and pushed her chair under the table. "I can go get food for both of us again, Mother. What would you like?"

"Whatever is easiest for you to carry. I don't have a preference."

"Okay, then. I'll make you something delicious!" Morgan assured then quickly disappeared into the kitchen. She was gone for less than a minute when Lucina heard a familiar voice call out to her.

"Lucina! There you are!"

"Huh?" Lucina looked over her shoulder to find Severa glaring down at her with arms crossed and her trademark scowl on her face. "Hello, Severa. What's the matter? You look grumpier than you usually do."

"What's the matter?" Severa cried dramatically. "Isn't it obvious?"

"Umm... Not really..."

"Gods, you can be so dense sometimes! I'm talking about your oh so secret love life that you told everyone else about before me!" Severa practically yelled.

"Severa... Not so loud..." Lucina pleaded. If anyone had lost attention in her since she and Morgan had walked in, they certainly had their eyes on her now.

"I'm going to speak as loud as I want to, thank you very much!"

"P...please Severa... It's making Lucina uncomfortable," a timid voice peeped from behind the other girl. "Hi Lucina," Noire gave a little wave, and then tried to speak to her fuming friend again. "Severa... Could we just sit down and talk about it instead of getting s...so angry?"

"Don't tell me what to do, Noire! I brought you along so you could back me up on this, not take *her* side!" Severa's yelling was growing louder.

Noire's face immediately contorted in rage, and the scowl she acquired put Severa's to shame. "BLOOD AND THUNDER! I SAID BE QUIET!"

Severa winced and tried glaring at Noire for a moment before she reluctantly gave up. "...Fine. You don't have to yell," she huffed, walking to the other side of the table and taking the chair across from Lucina. The moment Severa sat down, Noire's anger dispelled as quickly as it had grown.

"Eek! I...I...I'm so, so sorry!" the girl cried weakly, face becoming deathly pale as she looked around nervously. "I just attracted more attention, d...didn't I? I can't do anything right..."

"It's alright, Noire. Just sit down and try to act calm..." Lucina sighed.

"S...sorry..." Noire muttered again as she took the seat next to Severa.

"Well, even after all *that* is over with, don't think I'm done with you, Lucina! Firstly, it's Robin!?" Severa asked incredulously. "Robin has been your secret lover all this time?"

"I wouldn't describe him as my 'secret lover', but yes..." Lucina nodded.

"Hmm, I've gotta admit, I did not see that coming," Severa thought out loud as she absentmindedly twirled a strand of her long hair. Judging from her sudden shift in tone, Lucina figured her anger from before was only superficial. "Eh, he could have been worse, I guess," she shrugged after pondering the matter a little more.

"What do you mean that he could have been worse?"

"Oh? Nothing," Severa made it sound like she was surprised that Lucina had heard her. "I'm just saying that I kind of expected someone... you know... different."

"How so?"

"I'm talking appearance, Lucina," Severa sighed like it was the most obvious reason. "I thought that anyone *you* would fall for would be much more attractive. Someone who would ride up to you on a white stallion and sweep you up off your feet and ride off with you into the sunset or something."

"What fantasy book did you take that one from?" Lucina asked, raising her eyebrow. "That's the most unrealistic thing I've ever heard. And you know I would hate that anyways, Severa."

"And then there's his hair..." Severa murmured.

"What's wrong with his hair now?"

"That silvery-white color. I think a man with blue hair would best compliment yours. Maybe a slightly darker shade..." Severa seemed to be having more of a conversation with herself than with Lucina. "Also, Robin's hair sticks up in a few places. It looks all disheveled. Your prince should have smooth, flowing locks," she grinned.

"Severa, I don't care about what his hair looks like! Personally, I think-"

"Speaking of prince..." Severa interrupted. "It would have been *much* better if you fell in love with an actual prince. Now *that* would have been a storybook romance."

"Everything you're talking about is right out of a storybook!" Lucina was growing annoyed, but Severa didn't seem to take the hint.

"You're a princess, so therefore you deserve a prince at your side. Who is Robin, again? Yeah, some guy your dad found in a field one day who turned out to be the son of a lunatic... Not the ideal social status if you ask me."

"Stop, Severa." Lucina warned, growing tired of all her friend's criticisms. "Again, I don't care about those things!"

"Severa..." Noire spoke up to plead with her, but the other girl refused to hear.

"Not to mention the fact that he has little to no respect for cleanliness." She shook her head in disappointment. "I mean, have you seen that awful tea stain he has on that coat he always wears? He's had it for weeks and has never bothered to clean it. Not once! I thought he would be smart enough to, you know, maybe know how to wash his clothes? Some tactician we have," Severa smirked.

Lucina took one look at the girl's smug face and couldn't contain herself any longer. "Stop it!" she cried, cheeks flush with

anger. "How can you possibly say all those mean things about him, Severa? How many times have his plans kept you out of danger? All of us out of danger!" She dug her nails into the soft wood of the tabletop as she continued. "And do you want to know why he has that stain on his coat? I'll tell you why. It was me! I spilled it on him and it was entirely my fault, so if you want someone to mock about it, mock me instead! I fell in love with Robin because he's kind and caring and funny and intelligent and selfless! So if you want to have a storybook romance, you have your fairy tales to yourself! He makes me happy, and I wouldn't want him any other way!" Seeing the shocked look on Severa's face replacing that smirk made Lucina's speech feel worth it. "And personally, like was about to say before I was so rudely interrupted, I happen to find him very attractive," she felt the need to add.

"Wow..." Severa sighed after a moment. "That was easier than I thought."

"What?"

"All I needed to do was insult him a few times for you to tell me *all* about how you feel for him! I didn't think it would be that easy to get all of those gushy emotions out of a serious girl like you, Lucina," Severa laughed, looking very pleased with herself.

"Y...You mean... that's what you were trying to do all along?" Noire asked timidly.

"Well, duh. I knew Lucina wouldn't tell me honestly how madly in love with him she is if I just went up and asked her. So I just threw out some little criticisms and waited for Lucina's defensiveness to take over."

"I gave you the exact response you wanted..." Lucina realized in disgust. "That's low, even for you, Severa."

"You should have seen your face, Lucina," Severa grinned, paying Lucina's comment no mind. "I don't think I've ever seen you get so red. You must *really* like him to have gotten so mad! Also, you gave me some juicy little tidbits of information when you were yelling at me. Now when he comes back, I can tell him that you think he's extremely attractive."

Lucina's face was growing red again, not from anger but from embarrassment. "I...I didn't say that!"

"Please. You literally just told me, Noire, and all the other people in here that you think our tactician is hot."

Lucina once again became aware that Severa wasn't the only one who could hear her. The entire army must have just heard that outburst... Lucina blushed fiercely and put her hands over her face. "Severa..." she groaned. "What did I ever do to you to deserve this?"

"Hey, I'm not the one obsessing over my boyfriend's physique," Severa shrugged. "You were the one who felt so strongly about it that you had to tell everyone."

Lucina groaned again and put her head on the table in shame. "That isn't what I meant..."

"D...Don't worry, Lucina," Noire made an attempt at cheering her up and gave a small smile. "I think all those things you had to say about Robin were very sweet. I...I'm a little jealous of you actually. I think Severa is too."

"What? I am most certainly not jealous!" Severa cried as if the very thought was incomprehensible. "I actually was angry about something! Not jealous! I just have to remember what it was..." She twirled her hair again as she thought. "Oh, right! Why didn't you tell me first, Lucina?!"

"Tell you what first?" Lucina mumbled, taking her head out of her arms.

"You promised that as soon as you decided to tell everyone who you were in love with that I would be the first to know! Instead you tell your mother first, and then you tell your father, who if I recall correctly was the exact person who you were trying to keep it a secret from, before your best friend!"

"Firstly, I never promised you anything like that. You walked out on me before I could even finish my sentence," Lucina began. "I told my mother because I was following your advice, in which you specifically told me to tell someone else besides you. And I had to tell my father to explain who Morgan was when I found her."

"What about me?" As if on cue, Morgan walked up behind her mother with two trays piled high with an assortment of foods. "Sorry I'm late, Mother! I was talking to Mister Gaius in the kitchen. He's a funny guy! And he gave me this lollipop too!" She placed her trays down to present the treat she had been given. "Would you like it, Mother?"

"No thank you, Morgan. You can have it."

"Suit yourself," the girl grinned and popped the candy in her mouth before taking her seat.

"Look who it is," Severa grunted. "You *had* to go and make it interesting, didn't you, Lucina?"

"Make it interesting?"

"I'm sorry. Have we met?" Morgan glanced across the table at the two other girls. Taking the lollipop out of her mouth, she stuck out her hand to shake. "My name's Morgan! What's yours?"

"No, we haven't met," Severa glared at Morgan intensely before deciding to accept the handshake. "Severa, and remember that. I'm not going to be too happy if you come skipping up to ask me what my name is every five minutes, you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Morgan gave her a very formal salute in understanding.

Severa narrowed her eyes. "Are you always so cheerful and bubbly? Because it's actually gross how happy your face looks."

"I guess that's just me," Morgan shrugged. "It feels nice to be happy."

"I'm sure it is, kid..."

"Well, I think your daughter is really cute too, Lucina," Noire commented. "Nice to meet you, Morgan. My name's Noire. I'm one of Lucina's friends." She paused, face worried as if she had said something wrong. "W...Wait! I a...am one of your f...friends, right, Lucina?"

"Of course you are, Noire," Lucina reassured her. "Why would you think I wasn't your friend?"

"I j...just got worried for a second that the only reason you were friendly to me was because you felt bad for my... condition," Noire stammered. "I...I'm not the most normal person to associate with..."

"What's so weird about you?" Morgan put her finger to her lips as she scrutinized Noire for any oddities she might discover. "You look just fine to me! Maybe a little shy, but that's not really that weird!"

Noire slammed her fist down hard on the table in an explosion of energy, rattling plates of food loudly. "I AM NOT SHY! THERE IS NOTHING WEIRD ABOUT ME!" Her nostrils flared intensely and she looked like she was about to punch someone in the face for a moment until she reverted back to other self. "Ahh! I d...did it again, didn't I? That's w...what I meant! I hope I didn't scare you, Morgan..."

Morgan blinked in surprise, and then burst into laughter.

"W...What's so funny?" Noire looked horrified by her own actions. "A...Aren't I scary when I'm like that?"

"Oh, you're really scary!" Morgan agreed. "But that's so cool! You have like, a berserker mode! Have you ever tried that against your enemies?"

"It sometimes happens in battle..." Noire told her. "I guess my e...enemies do get a little freaked out when I... change."

"I bet that would be an awesome strategy!" Morgan exclaimed. "You can really turn the tide of a battle if you can throw your enemy off guard! Lure them in close, pretending to be all weak and helpless, and then... you strike!" She shouted, raising her hands up in the air like she was about to grab Noire from across the table. "Oh... Did I scare you, Noire?"

Noire waited until some of the color came back to her face before responding. "I...It's okay. I just don't do well with surprises..."

"Sorry about that!" Morgan apologized. "I'll try to remember not to do it again!"

"N...No, it's okay! You couldn't have known." Noire managed a small smile. "T...Thank you for the advice though. I really appreciate that you can deal with me. I hope we can be friends too! I...If you want too, of course! Because I would completely understand if you didn't!"

"I love making friends!" Morgan beamed. "When I'm not with Mother, we could do some fun things together!"

Noire let out a nervous laugh. "T...That would be nice. I could p...probably use some more positive influence in my life."

"Yeah!" Morgan cheerfully agreed and took a bite of her food. "Can we do things with Noire tomorrow, Mother?" She asked, turning to Lucina like a hopeful child.

"We'll see how tomorrow goes," Lucina smiled, feeling the sudden urge to brush away some crumbs on her daughter's face. Whether or not it was her maternal instincts starting to take over, Lucina wasn't sure, but she couldn't help herself from wiping Morgan's chin with the back of her glove. "Morgan, your face is all dirty again..."

"Stop it, Mother! That tickles!" The girl laughed and tried to squirm away, shaking her head to make it harder for Lucina to reach her.

"Well if you would stop moving... I would be done already..." Lucina grunted. Morgan stopped fidgeting just long enough for her mother to finish. "How many times have we had to clean your face today?" She was beginning to find the girl's laughter contagious. "Use a napkin, sweetie."

"Sorry, Mom! I guess I'm not too good at remembering that either!"

"Ugh... This happiness... It's making my brains melt," Severa groaned, putting her elbows on the table and resting her head in her hands. "Lucina, don't take this the wrong way or whatever, but how are you laughing and not freaking out right now? Because I am. I know I do a fantastic job of not showing it, but I mean, you just found this girl in some old ruins in the middle of nowhere who claims to be your daughter from the future! Doesn't that bother you of all people at least a little bit? And by little bit, I mean throw your naturally cautious mind into overdrive?"

"Well, it did at first," Lucina admitted. "But I'm getting this feeling that I've never experienced before, and it's telling me that I have a daughter."

"But where in Naga's name did she come from? She obviously didn't come from the world we did. I thought we all were the only time-traveling children around here," Severa wondered. "How could your future daughter show up if you're from the future too?"

"I honestly don't know. But I think she's proved to me that she's my daughter after today, didn't you?" Lucina grinned, turning to Morgan. "Besides her hair and the Brand in her eye of course."

"Oh gods, don't tell me she took you to the training grounds to spar with her, did she?" Severa asked Morgan desperately.

"We did!" Morgan cheerily replied. "We were having so much fun that we were there all day!"

Severa leaned back in her seat. "Typical Lucina move. Typical!" She threw her hands up in the air like it was the worst possible thing that Lucina could have done. "You get a daughter, and first thing you do with her is train, train, train! You know what's going to happen? You're going to set such high standards because you're so perfect at everything that she won't be able to keep up, and she's going to end up feeling like your failed copy."

"Severa..." Noire sighed. "Can you please at least just pretend to be happy for them? Everything doesn't have to relate back to you, you know. Or it *could*!" she added as soon as Severa gave her a cold glare.

"I'm not saying I'm not happy for them," Severa protested. "I just saying that even our perfect friend here can do something more normal like play a board game or something with her equally perfect daughter."

"I love board games!" Morgan exclaimed. "Strategy ones! Father would play them with me all the time so I could practice honing my tactical skills. You could play one with us when he comes back if you want, Severa."

"Ha! I think I just threw up in my mouth a little." Severa denied the offer ungraciously. "Wait... She just reminded me of the *other* reason why I was mad at you from before, Lucina!"

"Why are you mad at Mother?" Morgan frowned and leaned a little closer to Lucina protectively.

"Girl things. You wouldn't understand, kid," Severa dismissed the girl's protest.

"Hey! I'm a girl too!" Morgan's frown turned into a pout of frustration, but Severa ignored her.

"You did exactly what I told you not to do, Lucina! I explicitly instructed you not to mess up this romance that you have, and what do you do? You try to kill him, and then he runs away. Brilliant."

"Severa, I said I made a terrible mistake..." Lucina winced. "...I thought I was doing what was in the world's best interest, but I would have never been able to do it..."

"Yeah! Mother just messed up, but that's okay! Father will be back soon!" Morgan added.

"He'd better," Severa grunted. "This love story had better not end in a tragedy, got it? I hate sad endings."

"Mother and Father's love conquers all!" Morgan raised her fist in the air, emboldened by her own statement. "Don't you worry, Severa! Mother, Father, and I will be one big, happy family sooner than you think!"

"What did I just hear about being a family?" Chrom asked with a grin on his face, suddenly appearing along with Sumia behind Lucina's chair.

"Does this mean two people I know are getting along now?" Sumia wondered with a hopeful expression.

Before Lucina could respond to her parents' questions, Severa was already standing up and pushing in her chair. "Well, nice talk and whatnot, but I think it's time we take our leave. We wouldn't want to intrude on what's probably going to be a golden family moment, wouldn't we Noire?"

"O...Oh! Of course not!" Noire stammered, rising to her feet as well and hurriedly murmuring her goodbyes to Lucina and Morgan before she joined Severa at a different table.

Chrom and Sumia took the two empty seats they left behind, trying to figure out why the other two girls were so quick to leave. "Lucina..." her father began to ask. "Why do I get the feeling that your friend Severa hates me with a burning passion? Did I do something to offend her?"

"No, it isn't you specifically, Father," Lucina sighed. "It's... a problem to address another day."

"Okay then..." Chrom glanced at Severa from across the room before returning to his earlier conversation. "So anyways, you haven't disowned Morgan anymore, have you Lucina?"

"No, that was a mistake I needed to fix right away," Lucina smiled. "We're doing much better, Father."

"We are, Grandfather!" Morgan chipped in eagerly. "Mother and I are inseparable now! You should have seen what we did today! Mother taught me *all* about swordfighting, and then we sparring a lot together and Mother said that she was really proud of me!"

"Is that so?" Chrom smiled and looked at Lucina like he knew it would work out between them all along. "You must be really good to squeeze a compliment out of your mother, especially when it comes to swordplay. She doesn't just throw them out to anyone."

"She knows all of my moves. My stance, my devotion to technique, everything. It's like I was fighting myself," Lucina explained. "Considering that she doesn't remember learning it, I was impressed by the abilities she's retained from her future. I really didn't have to teach her much at all."

"So much for being a bad mother now, isn't that right, Lucina?" Chrom laughed.

"Mother is like, the best mother ever," Morgan insisted. "We haven't even really known each other for that long and already she's so nice and helpful and loving!"

"That's wonderful," Sumia folded her hands happily. "And I have this to say this again, but aren't you just the sweetest little thing?" She cooed to Morgan. "Oh, Lucina. You're so lucky you have such an adorable child! And she has such pretty hair like you do!"

"Aw, your hair is pretty too, Grandmother!"

"Well, I know who's getting my dessert tonight."

"Really? Are you sure you don't want it?" Morgan asked eagerly.

"Of course I am, love," Sumia reassured. "What do you think it is, Chrom? I see her face and just want to give her whatever I have. Is it a grandparent-first grandchild relationship?"

"No clue." Chrom scratched the back of his head. "I'm still trying to come to terms with the fact that I'm a grandfather already. Our little Lucina is probably swaddled up in a blanket and sleeping in her crib by now. I hope she's doing okay without us..."

"If our Lucina at home is anything like our Lucina here, she'll be okay," Sumia's smile was confident but sad. "She takes after you, Chrom."

"I'm sure she misses you both very much..." Lucina sighed, looking down at the table.

"What was that, Lucina?" Sumia asked.

"Nothing..."

"This godforsaken war..." Chrom muttered under his breath. "I want to see my baby girl again. As soon as we find Validar, we're going to put an end to him and the fighting for good."

"Yes, please..." Lucina agreed.

"Frederick went out to meet with our scouts this morning. He should be back any minute, hopefully with information that we can use. It's not like Frederick to be late," Chrom told her. "Don't worry, Lucina. We'll bring Robin back."

"Father..." Morgan whispered.

"Yes. I'm sure he'll be overjoyed to meet you," Lucina put on a smile and glanced at the girl to judge her expression.

"Father..." she repeated again slightly louder. Her eyes looked worried, and she stared ahead blankly at nothing in particular.

"Morgan?" Lucina put her hand on the girl's arm, which was unusually tense. "What's the matter?"

Morgan was unresponsive to her question, and she raised a hand to her head. "I...Is that you?" she stammered, starting to look around the tent frantically. "I can hear you, but I can't see you!"

"Who are you talking to?" Lucina asked, not trying to hide her growing concerns.

"C...Can you hear me, Father? Where are you?"

"What is she talking about, Lucina?" Chrom frowned.

"I...I don't know!" Lucina was starting to panic, gripping the girl by both of her shoulders and trying to hold her shaking body still. Tearing off her glove, Lucina pressed the back of her hand to the girl's forehead to check her temperature. She was sweating slightly, and it seemed like she had a fever. "Morgan, what's wrong? Answer me!"

"Father, what's wrong?" Morgan echoed as if she was in some kind of trance. "Y...You sound hurt!"

Chrom and Sumia were already out of their chairs and standing over the girl worriedly. "Lucina, has she done this before?" Sumia asked.

"No, she hasn't!" Lucina panicked. "Morgan..." she begged. "Please answer me..."

"Father!"

"Is she talking to Robin?"

"I don't know how that's possible! He isn't here!"

Morgan raised both her hands to her head, expression terrified. "Father!" she wailed again, then squeezed her eyes shut and screamed out loud.

Lucina clenched her teeth in fear and pulled Morgan into her chest, not knowing what else she could do. "Oh gods..." She came to a sudden thought as she squeezed the girl close. "What if she has Robin's headaches too?"

"Please no..." Chrom winced at the idea.

"In any case, let's get her someplace where she can lie down," Sumia proposed nervously.

"I'll get her, Lucina," Chrom volunteered, lifting Morgan up into his arms and running out of the tent with his wife and daughter following close behind. As soon as he arrived at the small tent Morgan had been given, Chrom rested Morgan down gently into her bed. He then backed away to make room for Lucina, who rushed over and sat down on the girl's bedside so she could clutch her hand tightly.

Morgan's face gradually relaxed, and she opened her eyes to look around. "M...Mother?"

"Yes," Lucina let out the breath she had been holding. "I'm here, sweetie. I'm here..."

"T...That was s...scary, Mother!"

"What happened, Morgan?" Lucina asked quietly. "You were talking like you couldn't hear me... I was so afraid that something terrible happened to you..."

"I'm sorry, Mother... I didn't mean to scare you..." Morgan apologized. "I don't know what came over me. One second I was with you and Grandfather and Grandmother, and then the next I was with Father..."

"Y...You saw him? How is that possible? Do you know where he is?"

"No... I didn't really see him, but I heard his voice. It was definitely him."

"But then what happened? Was it a headache as terrible as the ones your Father gets? You screamed like you were in pain!"

"I felt a pain, but it wasn't my own." Morgan looked deep into her Mother's eyes in concern. "It was... Father's. There was something else there, Mother! Something thing dark... and it was talking to Father."

"What was it saying?"

"I don't know. I couldn't make it out, but I could hear Father talking back to it, like he was arguing with it," Morgan explained. "But that was the scariest part, Mother! He sounded so weak... Not strong like the Father that I remember. He was fighting that shadow as hard as he could, but it sounded like he was losing!"

"Robin..."

"Every time Father tried to stand up and fight back, the shadow would say something and push him to the ground," the girl continued in fear. "I screamed when it attacked him again while he was down! It c...consumed him, and I couldn't hear him anymore!" Morgan's eyes were watery. "He's in so much pain, Mother! He needs help!"

Lucina turned around desperately to face her parents. "Father, we need to find Robin now! Please!"

"Milord!" Frederick suddenly threw open the tent flap before her father could respond and hurried inside.

"Frederick! Perfect timing!" Chrom told him.

"The rest of the Shepherds told me what happened. Is the young Princess okay?"

"She is now," Chrom replied. "Please, Frederick. Did you find anything at all about where Validar is? We need to find him immediately. Robin *needs* to come home..."

"If our sources are correct, then I think that we can make a safe assumption where the Plegian king has gone," Frederick explained. "Apparently, huge groups of Grimleal all over Plegia have left their homes and have been marching mindlessly day and night without rest."

"How many people are we talking about here, Frederick? Hundreds?"

"Thousands," Frederick corrected. "And they all seem to be marching towards the same location."

"Where?"

"An ancient place of worship in the middle of the desert. I was told that the Plegians call it the Dragon's Table."

"The Dragon's Table..." Lucina whispered in horror. "Of course... That was the place in the future where Grima was said to rest his wretched body and restore his energy from time to time... It was the place so shrouded by the dark clouds that contaminated our world that no sunlight could reach it, the place where his power was the strongest... Father, Validar is going to try and bring that monster back! We can't let that happen! We can't!"

"We won't, Lucina," Chrom assured and gritted his teeth. "Frederick, tell everyone to prepare and pack up their belongings tonight. We leave for the Dragon's Table first thing tomorrow, before the sun rises. The fate of the world may very well be decided by how fast we can make it there. Am I making myself clear?"

"Perfectly, milord," Frederick folded his hands behind his back and gave a sharp bow to show he understood. "I will make sure that the rest of the army gets the same message." With his final statement, the knight immediately hurried outside back in the direction of the dining tent.

"I'll get Cordelia to help me saddle all the horses so they'll be ready for tomorrow." Sumia touched Chrom's arm to get his attention as she began to step out of the tent as well.

"Thank you, Sumia," Chrom told her, and then turned to his daughter. "Lucina, I'm going to help prepare. Will you and Morgan be okay?"

"I can help!" Morgan sat upright before her mother caught her arm.

"Are you sure you'll be alright?" Lucina asked the girl worriedly. "You can rest if you need to."

"No. We need all the help we can get if we're to save Father as soon as we can, right? I can't lie around while he's hurting!" Morgan replied surely, standing up out of bed.

Lucina couldn't argue with her explanation. "Just make sure that you tell me if you feel something like that will happen again, okay?"

"Don't worry, Mother! I'll stick close to you!"

Lucina nodded, and the three all walked outside to get to work.

Please stay strong just a little while longer, Robin, Lucina begged him over and over in her mind. We're coming! Stay strong!

We're moving into the endgame arc from here on out, so things are about to get a lot more intense! Lucina certainly means business now!

Morgan in this chapter essentially has a vision of one of Robin's particularly bad headaches, but she doesn't actually get the same kind of intense pain that her father gets. Robin couldn't hear or see her the whole time, so he doesn't know that Morgan exists yet. She could only feel his struggle unfold without being able to do anything. What an interesting one-way link they have...

Chapter 18: Odyssey

Make sure that you're all caught up with the previous few chapters before reading! This one was going to be finished yesterday, but I decided to hold off a bit so I could double the usual chapter length and give you guys a nice, lengthy read for today!

In which the Shepherds arrive at the Dragon's Table and the countdown to the ruined future begins

Chapter 18 – Odyssey

"Chrom..."

"I can see them, Lissa..."

"But they're sooo creepy..."

"They are rather unsettling..."

"Have you tried talking to one of them?" Lissa threw her hands up into the air, unsatisfied with her brother's responses. "Watch, yeah? I'll even be all extra sweet and stuff." She dismounted her horse and casually strolled over to one of the Plegian villagers marching right beside them. "Excuse me, sir," Lissa tapped a middle-aged man on the shoulder. "May I ask you where you're going on this fine day?"

The man halted his march and stood still for a few seconds. The hundreds of other Plegians did not pause to question why he had stopped; they simply parted around him and Lissa on both sides like an ocean wave. The man slowly turned his head over his shoulder and stared at Lissa with glazed eyes before responding to her question in a monotone voice. "The appointed time for our collective prayer... The Dragon's Table, his holy lair... To awaken our master from his eternal sleep... We offer our souls for Grima to reap..." The other marchers surrounding him repeated his exact phrases, which spread through the crowd until the entire landscape seemed to echo the chant.

"Yeah... Thanks... Just going to back away slowly now..." Lissa attempted a fake smile, and then waved the man off and quickly leapt back on her horse. "Ugh..." she shivered, clutching her sides. "You see? That's the creepiest thing I've ever heard, and I don't even know what it means. And it rhymes, which makes it extra creepy..."

Chrom groaned and slumped forward slightly on his horse. "What bothers me the most is that Lucina's cataclysmic future is almost upon us and these people can't walk any faster! We need to get to the Dragon's Table now!"

The Shepherds had been marching from before dawn to after dusk for three days and had reached Plegia in record time. However, as soon as they neared the relative location of the Dragon's Table, their progress was severely hampered by the huge lines of Plegians that slowly trudged on in the same direction.

Chrom turned to his left, running a few fingers through his hair. "Lucina, do you know where it is? We have to be close... I can't see a damn thing on the horizon through these clouds."

"We should be," Lucina nervously responded, prying one of her hands off the reins of her horse to point up at the sky. "Do you see how all the clouds seem to be spiraling out of one location in the distance? The Dragon's Table should be at their heart."

"Mother? Are you feeling okay?" Morgan asked quietly, urging her own horse closer to Lucina's. "You look pale..."

"...All my actions have had the primary objective of preventing the Fell Dragon to rise again, but I fear that everything I've done may have been for naught," Lucina solemnly replied. "But we mustn't give up hope. Even if there's the smallest chance we can stop his resurrection, we must take it."

"And take it we shall," Chrom declared. "I'm sure that I speak for all of the Shepherds when I say that we'll refuse to give up, even now in our darkest hour."

"Thank you, Father... I just pray we aren't already too late..."

"Frederick!" Chrom called. "How long do you think it will take us to reach that point there moving at this speed?" He gestured into the distance at the spot that Lucina had described.

"At this speed?" The knight rode up beside Chrom and made a few quick calculations in his head. "I would approximate about two hours."

"Two hours? We don't have that kind of time..." Chrom muttered. "There has to be some way through other than trampling over all these people. Have our pegasus knights reported back about any breaks in the crowd? Even if there are thousands of Plegians, this line can't stretch on forever."

"That's precisely the problem, milord. The Plegians have formed a ring of sorts around the Dragon's Table. As they get closer, that ring becomes smaller but more densely packed. Soon it will be next to impossible to get through on horseback."

"We can't carry all of our supplies on foot though. We'd be going no faster than we are now."

"But we might not have that option, Father," Lucina interjected. "If we have to stop moving entirely on horseback, we must walk. We don't have the luxury of waiting for the Plegians to disperse. Grima could be revived today!"

"I know that, but I don't want to abandon all of our medical supplies along with the convoy... It won't do us much good to arrive at the Dragon's Table ill-equipped to fight either... Destiny is a stubborn dastard, I'll give it that."

"Why can't we just push through?" Morgan asked. "That would seem like the easiest solution to the problem."

"We would if we could, but it's like trying to part an ocean. For all the Plegians we move out of the way, more would slip in to take their places." Chrom put a hand to his head in frustration. "If these people would just stop moving though for a few minutes, we'd be able to..."

As if heeding Chrom's words, the Plegians suddenly halted their march as a collective group. Like the man that Lissa stopped earlier, they all stood unnaturally still, gazes never shifting from their destination. Together they raised their arms high into the air and spoke as one. "On the edge of this most holy place we shall wait... Until our Lord Grima has risen to seal our fate..." As soon as their chant ended, they dropped their arms limply to their sides and fell silent.

"Was it something I said?" Chrom blinked a few times in surprise. "Why did they all just stop?"

"They can't go past this point..." Morgan spoke slowly in realization, carefully scanning the horizon. "Something is stopping them... It's telling them to wait..."

"How did you know that, Morgan?"

"I...I'm not sure... It's the same presence that I felt with my father a few days ago... It's here too."

"Grima..." Lucina gritted her teeth. "He's getting stronger... Father, we need to hurry!"

"Right," Chrom nodded, and then turned around to address the army as a whole. "Shepherds! Clear a path so we can all get through before this crowd starts moving again!"

The army gave a few murmurs of acknowledgement as they began the painstaking process of attempting to move the Plegians out of the way. The crowd made no complaints as the Shepherds gently shoved them aside, and they often wandered off for a few steps in the direction they were pushed. They just weren't moving as quickly as Lucina would have liked, and every extra minute that the Shepherds spent relocating them was precious time wasted.

"We have to get moving..." she groaned, urging a young Plegian woman off the path. "Is that the last of them, Father?"

"It should be," Chrom nodded in agreement. "This should be enough space for the convoy. Shepherds! Forward march!" he barked. "Quickly! We make for the Dragon's Table!"

Lucina immediately leapt back on her horse and joined the rest of the army as they thundered forward through the crowd. Without anything to slow their pace, their destination came into view within minutes rather than hours.

"You weren't exaggerating when you described this place as foul, Lucina," Chrom muttered, motioning for the Shepherds to slow down as he glanced up at the gnarled structure before them. The ominous clouds that writhed their way across the sky all seemed to converge around the altar. With the spire of the Dragon's Table at their center, the clouds were now beginning to spin in a pinwheel pattern, slowly but steadily picking up speed. Periodically the windows flashed with a purple light, bathing the ancient ruins that surrounded the structure in an eerie glow.

"The Dragon's Table..." Morgan's voice was suddenly fearful, and she seemed to shrink backwards in the saddle of her horse. "It's alive with his power... I can feel it."

"Grima's power can influence your father," Lucina reminded her. "I don't know if he has that same influence over you, but I don't want to take the chance of leaving you vulnerable. Stay very close to me when you can, and be sure to tell me if

anything doesn't feel right, okay?"

"I will, Mother. I said I would before."

"No, Morgan," Lucina looked at her gravely. "By anything I mean absolutely anything. Not just if you have another vision. Any strange thought, impulse, or desire. I need to know. Grima can break even the strongest minds with his will."

Morgan returned her gaze sadly, voice becoming hardly audible over the clamor of the horses. "Even Father?"

"I...I'm not going to say... that it wouldn't be possible," Lucina winced at the question. "I've seen Grima... shatter the minds of entire armies at his full power... But that's why we need to hurry! Stopping Grima's resurrection to his true strength once again is the only way that we can save your father!"

"Right!" Morgan nodded. "We can do it!"

"Isn't that just precious? Such confident words from such a small girl!"

"Who said that?"

"Forgotten me already?" the voice chuckled. "I had hoped the Yisseans would remember someone as beautiful as I." A dark coated pegasus swooped low over Lucina's head from behind, and then soared into the sky above them. "It looks like you've caught us, milord," Aversa smirked. "I suppose you must think that you have us cornered, don't you?"

"Aversa!" Chrom yelled up at her. "Stand down! We've come to put an end to this madness once and for all!"

"Oh? What a pity," the woman sighed sarcastically, twirling a few hairs on her pegasus's mane with her finger. "I thought you had come to meet the Fell Dragon face to face. I'm sure Grima would appreciate such royalty attending his resurrection."

"Are you blind? We've come to stop Grima, not allow him to return!"

"Then I'm afraid you were all *this* close." Aversa held up two fingers as if she was about to pinch the air. "My master is making the final preparations as we speak. He mustn't be disturbed now. Resurrecting our god is a remarkably delicate process, you see."

"Grima is no god!" Lucina retaliated in anger. "Grima is a monster who'll bring hell upon this world! I've seen it! Is that the world you want?! Not even a witch like you could possibly desire that!"

"A witch? My, what despicable manners. I've done nothing but be nice to you, girl," Aversa glared at Lucina with subtle venom in her eyes. "I'm sure Grima will be *most* pleased to meet you again." She laughed menacingly, pretending to almost fall off her mount. "A witch!" she repeated, as if it was the funniest thing she had ever heard. "Beauty doesn't last forever, dear! You see how age has taken its toll on poor, little me. But don't just take it from yours truly! I'll enjoy it quite a bit when Grima puts a nice gash in that pretty face of yours!"

"Hey! Don't talk to my mother like that!" Morgan shouted up at the woman in rage.

"If it isn't the sweet little girl from earlier!" Aversa grinned. "How noble of you, child, defending your mother... Correct me if I'm mistaken, but aren't you from the future as well? That's quite odd, isn't it? A future girl the daughter of another?" She paused, taking a closer look at Morgan. "Oh my! I recognize that outfit! Who may your father be, girl?"

"My father is Robin! And he wouldn't be happy about what you just said to Mother if he were here!"

"Ah ha ha! Look what he did!" The woman ignored Morgan's threats. "That foolish Yissean princess is the mother of my little brother's child? How clever of him! Taint the Yissean royal bloodline so that it may never again threaten Grima!"

"My father would never do that!"

"Wait, Robin is your brother?" Chrom asked incredulously.

"No, not really you twit!" Aversa replied. "Is he my master's son and rightful heir to the Plegian throne? Yes! Are we related? Of course not!"

"Then who are you, Aversa? Why do you stand by Validar's side?"

"Me? I am nobody," the woman shrugged. "I live to serve my master. Nothing more. If the world he seeks to create will be hell, then so be it."

"Then you are blind! How can you so willingly allow Validar to control you? He isn't the man you may think he is! You don't even speak about him affectionately, like a daughter would! You call him your master, which makes you his slave!"

"I desire no affection from him, nor does he seek any from me," Aversa hissed. "He found me orphaned on the streets, took me in, fed me, and molded me into the woman I am today. People can't change so easily, prince!"

"You could change!" Chrom shouted back. "You could help us stop Grima's resurrection! My sister believed that people could change, and so do I! You don't have to be a pawn in Validar's twisted game any longer!"

"Ha! Me, join you? I think you and your exalted sister are the ones who are blind!" Aversa laughed. "Tell me, prince... What are all the Grimleal in Plegia doing here at this very spot? It's called a Table for a reason. Surely you've figured it out by now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Honestly..." Aversa rolled her eyes. "This is where Grima feeds, you fool!"

"We offer our souls for Grima to reap..." Chrom repeated the last line of the villagers' chant in horror. "You don't mean..."

"Now you're finally starting to get it. These people have come from miles away to carry out one purpose: to become our Lord Grima's first meal after a thousand years! Grima will be craving something to eat after such a long nap, and what better than to devour the souls of thousands of his loyal followers?"

"No!" Lucina cried. "That can't be! Why would they ever offer up their lives to that... that demon?"

"It is their destiny, girl! For generation after generation the Grimleal have prayed for his return, and those prayers are about to be answered! You can attempt to go back and make them change their minds if you'd like. I'd love to see you try," the woman told her. "But they won't change! And neither will my master's dear son! His destiny soon approaches as well!"

"You don't know Robin!" Lucina shouted back desperately. "You don't know what he can do!"

"But I must know more than you, girl. Isn't that why he appears to be missing from your little ragtag group?"

Lucina couldn't find a counterargument. Robin was gone because she had believed he wouldn't be able to change...

"Enough, Aversa!" Chrom changed the topic. "This is your last chance! You can surrender and join us to fight Grima, or we'll be forced to cut you down if you continue to stand in our way!"

"Fools! There is no fighting Grima!" Aversa smirked. "And unfortunately, I'm going to have to pick... neither one of your options. You see, as much as I'd love to stay and chat, I have to help my master in his preparations, so I can't stick around much longer. Fortunately though, I won't leave you without company!"

She flew farther away, seemingly in retreat, until she halted in front of the steps leading up into the Dragon's Table. She brought her pegasus closer to the ground and raised her hands high in the air, one of which held an ancient dark tome. The book's pages began to turn rapidly, and both tome and wielder were cloaked in mystic energy. Aversa then unleashed the magic through her fingertips into the ground in front of her. The dry earth began to quake and fracture, and a purple light similar the one in the windows of the Dragon's Table poured out of the cracked terrain. All at once, the shaking stopped and the light disappeared as an arm pushed its way from under the ground and groped at the empty air. Another emerged next to the first, and gradually a Risen swordmaster pulled itself out from its earthen tomb. After the first, eleven more followed suit, all eventually forming a line in front of the Dragon's Table.

"I'd like to introduce you to the Deadlords, little prince!" Aversa called in glee. "They're the company I promised you! They all have names, but I won't bother telling you each and every one. You don't have to worry about not knowing though. They don't talk much, as you'll soon see!"

"That's it?" Chrom asked. "Twelve Risen with special names? Do you honestly believe that they're supposed to hold us off for more than a minute or two?"

"You underestimate them!" Aversa responded. "These twelve generals were great warriors in life, and even greater in death! They were all legendary heroes in the different eras that they were alive, and they commanded entire armies! You'll see what's so special about them besides their names. They hold significant... influence over their Risen kin. So ta ta for now! Maybe you'll get your wish and never see Grima rise, because you'll already be dead!" The woman laughed again and gave a wave of goodbye before disappearing inside the altar.

The Deadlords remained still for a moment, and Chrom kept the Shepherds held steady in preparation for battle. The twelve Risen all bellowed a battle cry, which sounded eerily more human than monster, and just as Aversa had done they raised their hands high into the air. Dozens more creatures began to dig themselves out of the hardened sand, summoned by their leaders. In little time, the Risen army began to rival the size of the Ylissean army, with more troops continuing to claw their way to the surface in various locations around the Dragon's Table.

"Oh gods... I spoke too soon..." Chrom muttered under his breath before taking action and addressing the rest of the army. "Lissa! Take your division and set up the medical tents as quickly as possible!"

"You got it, big brother!"

"Convoy! Prepare the command tent and get the spare weapons ready!"

"Aye, commander!"

"Sumia, can you and Cordelia take to the skies and survey the enemy troop formations? We need to know how many there are and where they're the strongest."

"You can count on us, dear!"

"All remaining forces! Be ready and hold your ground until the enemy initiates their first attack! We don't want to all charge straight ahead without a plan if we don't have to! Speaking of plan... Robin! I need... Oh, right..." Chrom paused, realizing that he had called his head tactician out of habit. "Damn... Not again..." He looked around blankly for a few seconds until another thought came to his mind. "Morgan!"

"Huh? What is it, Grandfather?" Morgan had just finished dismounting her horse, and jogged over to Chrom's side with Lucina close behind.

"Morgan, you said that you're a tactician as well, right? Do you think you can take your father's place for this battle?"

"B...But I'm still a tactician-in-training!" Morgan stammered. "I'm nowhere near as good as Father yet! I could never take his place!"

"Not permanently," Chrom reassured to calm her. "But we need someone with a brilliant mind like your father's right now, and I think you would be the perfect candidate."

"Umm... What do you think, Mother? Do you think I'm up for it?" the girl tentatively asked. "Father hasn't been around, so I haven't been able to practice too much..."

"I think you'll do just fine, Morgan," Lucina agreed with Chrom. "If you are your father's daughter, I'm sure you'll have a few of his tricks up your sleeve."

"Okay..." Morgan didn't sound too sure, but she put on a determined expression and gave Chrom a rigid salute. "I'll do my best, Grandfather! I'm going to put everything Father has taught me to the test!"

"Good," Chrom sounded relieved. "I'm sure Robin would be proud. Meet me at the command tent as soon as it's set up. We'll work on our strategy in there."

"Got it! This is for you, Father!" Morgan declared as she ran off into the middle of the makeshift base that the army was furiously attempting to construct.

Chrom watched her go, allowing a slight smile to flash across his face. "You should be proud as well, Lucina," he murmured. "She's a good kid."

"I am," Lucina nodded. "Even though we haven't known each other for that long, she's the best daughter I could hope to have." She followed her father's gaze, watching the loose coat that Morgan wore flail around as she ran until she vanished out of sight behind one of the medical tents.

"Anyways, is it to the front lines for you again, Lucina?" Chrom asked.

"Yes, I'll be sure to counter any small forces that the enemy attempts to send out before the full-fledged attack," Lucina explained. "Then I can join you once you and Morgan come up with a plan."

"Very well. You're in charge while I'm gone! And save some Risen for me, will you?" Chrom joked. "You could probably destroy the entire enemy army by yourself if you put your mind to it."

"I'm not so sure about that..."

"Just joking, Lucina. We shouldn't be too long. Hopefully Morgan can match Robin's ability to come up with some crazy yet genius strategy on the spot," Chrom called back to her as he followed the path Morgan had taken.

Lucina began to prepare herself mentally for the fight, as she did before every major conflict they faced. It came so naturally to her now that it was as if she could immediately shift into a battle-ready state just by pulling a lever in her brain. She unsheathed Falchion, making a slow arc with the blade in front of her before holding it at her side. Toning down the clamor of the rest of the army attempting to organize themselves behind her, she instead focused all of her senses on the opposing end of the battlefield. Even from far away, Lucina watched the enemy movements closely as she tried to predict how they would strike from experience.

What Lucina wasn't prepared for was how fast the Risen managed to assemble themselves into attack formations under their commanders. Their unearthly, collective roar pierced the tense atmosphere, and the noise gave away to the thundering footsteps of hundreds charging down the battlefield.

We aren't ready... Lucina gritted her teeth in surprise and stole a glance behind her. The Shepherds were still in the middle of preparations, and a few yelps of panic sounded out from among their ranks. *We don't have a plan yet! Father and Morgan haven't had enough time!*

"Steady..." she commanded, holding up her left hand in a fist. The creatures were rapidly closing in, already a third of the way down the battlefield. She had no choice. Plan or no plan, she would have to meet the Risen halfway before they could reach the camp. "First and second battalions! Prepare to charge on my signal!"

Her grip tightened on Falchion. The thought that they were so close to changing the future, that only these Risen stood between them and Validar, only heightened her determination. The enemy was nearing... Any moment...

"Attack!" Lucina cried, dropping her left hand and raising Falchion into the air. A few battle cries from the Shepherds challenged those of their opponents as they heeded Lucina's command and began to charge forward as well.

The two armies clashed, and the battle quickly drove to chaos. Without any sort of strategy to conform to, the Shepherds were forced to devise their own split-second battle plans, many of which began to interfere with each other's. The Risen had already begun to take advantage of this weakness and were effectively crippling the Ylissean army's disorganized forces.

Lucina attempted to bring more order to the troops, shouting out commands while simultaneously fighting the enemy. "Regroup and use your combined forces to strike from the sides!" she called, bringing Falchion through a Risen's torso. "We need to press on and defeat their twelve commanders! We'll be able to finish them off easily once we strip them of their leadership!" She blocked a sudden jab from a lance, pushing the other weapon aside and thrusting her own blade through her attacker's chest.

Lucina strained to get a better view of the battlefield so she could locate any one of the Deadlords to aim for. Contrary to her expectations, they all had scarcely moved from their original positions and were instead lingering behind the rest of their soldiers. *Legendary heroes... More like cowards!* She growled to herself, singling out the closest one to her. "Let's go!" she beckoned to a struggling group of soldiers, cutting down two more creatures as she did so. "To me! We're to strike the Deadlord assassin!"

Lucina guided the troops to her target, cleaving a pathway with Falchion. The soldiers began to get their acts together under Lucina's instruction, and they were finally starting to fight up to the Ylissean army's reputation. Lucina countered a sword strike and threw her opponent off balance, allowing another one of her soldiers to finish the creature. Breaking through another enemy line, she came face to face with one of the Deadlords.

The creature pulled its hood down over its face so Lucina could only see its glowing eyes. Crouching low in an attack stance, the assassin hissed and revealed an ancient-looking dagger from beneath its cloak. With the other soldiers to cover her, Lucina brought Falchion close to her body and charged forward.

"Hyah!" She brought her blade down in a vertical slice, to which the Deadlord nimbly sidestepped. Using the downwards momentum of her sword, Lucina stepped into another lower strike. Again it evaded the attack, and then it leapt forward to deliver a few quick jabs of its own at Lucina. She immediately brought Falchion close to her for protection, adapting to the creature's speed as she countered its rapid strikes.

Shifting once more to the offensive, Lucina lashed out as the Deadlord recoiled from its assault. It moved quickly enough so that the attack wasn't fatal, but it couldn't escape a deep gash on its side as Falchion cleaved through its putrid flesh. The assassin took a few steps backwards, growling in anger and glaring at Lucina with its vicious eyes. It began to

approach again in a deceptively slow manner, causing Lucina to assume a defensive stance to guard her upper body. Darting forward at top speed, the creature instead attacked her legs, landing a few minor but irritating cuts in rapid succession before she could react. In the split second that Lucina altered her stance again, the Deadlord slashed at her briefly exposed arms. Grunting in pain, she moved out of the creature's reach as she searched for a weak point in its defenses.

From Lucina's right, an armored horse emerged and reared up on its hind legs, threateningly brandishing its forelegs in the air. The creature shifted its gaze, distracted for a moment, and Lucina saw her chance. Keeping Falchion held parallel to the ground, she lunged forward and pierced the assassin's lightly armored chest. The Deadlord dropped its dagger and put both hands to its wound, bellowing a roar before exploding violently with a burst of purple light and a cloud of shadowy dust.

"Milady! Are you alright?"

"Frederick!" Lucina turned to face the knight who had appeared beside her. "I'm fine, thank you. Just a few cuts. Nothing serious."

"Good," he hurriedly replied in relief. "I was just on my way back to retrieve a new sword when I noticed you fighting that creature."

"What happened to your other sword?"

The man held up what was left of his weapon. Half of the blade was missing, cleanly severed off the hilt. "I attempted to engage one of the Deadlords in battle, but its axe effortlessly cleaved through my blade. I was forced to retreat..." He scowled, disappointed in his own performance. "These weapons they wield... They bear a strange resemblance to artifacts of legend. If what Aversa said was true..."

"Then we have to let my father know!" Lucina realized. "We need to tell him what's happening here on the front lines! Where is he?"

"Still back at camp I believe," Frederick responded. "I do not think he has left the command tent since the beginning of battle."

"Has Morgan not come up with anything yet?" Lucina asked incredulously. "Frederick, can you take me there? I need to check on them and let them know how the battle is faring."

"It would be my pleasure, milady," Frederick held his hand out for Lucina to take, and then he lifted her up in front of him on his horse. Grasping the reins firmly, the knight urged his steed to push through the hordes of enemy soldiers and return to camp.

Lucina leapt off before the horse had even come to a complete halt in front of the command tent. Throwing open the tent flap, she found both her father and daughter hunched over a cluttered table.

"What if we split our primary attack force and moved it here and here?" Morgan suggested in a panic, shoving a few makeshift pieces that symbolized the Ylissean army all over a map. "Then we could try to assault the commanders from both sides!"

"That may work," Chrom put a hand to his forehead. "But that would leave the rest of our forces completely exposed to a counterattack from the enemy. If we don't succeed at taking out all the remaining Deadlords in one strike we would lose half our army. The ruins surrounding the battlefield don't give us as much space as you want to maneuver either..."

"Darn..." Morgan muttered in frustration, moving the pieces back to their original position.

"Father! Morgan!" Lucina called out to them and hurriedly walked inside.

"Mother!" Morgan looked up from the table. "What happened? Your arms and legs look all cut up!"

"It's nothing," Lucina assured. "Do you have any sort of plan yet? We need some kind of order on the battlefield!"

"I'm trying, Mother... B...But everything I try always seems to end up with losing most of our forces in the process... Their formations are so good, and the Deadlords keep summoning more soldiers. I don't know what to do!"

"Chrom!" Lissa stumbled into the tent, almost tripping over her own feet. "Chrom, we need to do something, and soon! The healers and I are working as fast as we can to put everyone back on their feet, but we're all exhausted and can't keep up at this rate... With every person we save there are two more waiting outside... We never had this many injuries with

Robin around..."

"I understand, Lissa," Chrom winced. "We're working on it. Focus on more critical wounds first. Just don't overexert yourself..."

"We *are* focusing on the near fatal wounds first," Lissa replied. "They take the most magic to heal..."

"Milord! I have something else to consider in your strategy," Frederick walked inside as well, new sword in his hand. "Some of the Deadlords wield weapons that were previously lost to the ages, weapons that can rival even Falchion in power and durability. It will be far too dangerous to approach them closely. They can cleave through ordinary swords and lances as if they were toothpicks."

"Just what we need right now," Chrom muttered, glaring at the pieces on the map in front of him. "...I need to get out there and lead the Shepherds. If this keeps up we won't have an army left to command."

"But what about the strategy, Grandfather?" Morgan asked desperately.

"We don't have any more time, and we aren't doing anyone good by standing around without making progress! We'll have to work on something as we fight!" Chrom answered, placing a hand on his Falchion's hilt. "Frederick, I'm going to have to ask you to take me to the front lines! I'll organize the Shepherds from there."

"Right away, milord."

"I'll get back to the medical tents," Lissa added, following the two men outside.

"I couldn't come up with a strategy, Mother," Morgan admitted in defeat. "This comes so easy to Father... I guess I'm not as good of a tactician as I thought I was..."

"Don't say that, Morgan!" Lucina stopped her. "You're still learning, and this is your first time trying for real. It's okay."

"Hmm..." Morgan sighed, taking a sudden interest in looking at her boots.

"How about trying out your fighting skills that we practiced?" Lucina offered. "We could use you on the battlefield if you feel up for it."

"Only if I can stay close to you so you can correct me when I mess up..."

"You aren't going to mess up," Lucina reassured. "Now come with me! We'll fight together!"

"Okay, Mother!" Morgan pushed the left side of her coat to the side to reveal a sheath strapped to her hip. "I have the sword you picked out for me!"

"Perfect," Lucina replied, already stepping outside. "Let's go!"

Lucina hurried to rejoin the fight with Morgan lingering close behind. She drew Falchion again and reassumed her stance, which Morgan copied herself. Together they dove into the midst of the battle, slashing away at Risen soldiers who stood in their path. Every few seconds Lucina would sneak a glance at her daughter to check how she was faring, and like she had done while they training, Morgan was exceeding her expectations. Using her small stature to her advantage, she easily slipped out of her enemy's reach and responded with quick, powerful slices of her own sword, felling her opponent before it had time to recover. Lucina found that she didn't have to check on her as frequently for she didn't need to be supervised. She was already rivaling Lucina in how many Risen she could take on at once, and her instincts were finely tuned for battle.

Chrom and Frederick had reached the front lines, and they were already yelling out orders and trying to assemble the army into better formations. The tides of the battle were beginning to shift, but the Shepherds were still at a major disadvantage. Only two of the Deadlords had fallen, including the one Lucina had defeated, and the rest were still summoning more troops, replacing every fallen Risen with a new one. There was no hope of them winning unless the ten left were killed, and quickly.

Lucina guided Morgan down the battlefield, attempting to reach the Deadlords once again. "Morgan!" she called over the uproar. "I'll clear a path for you! Can you strike their commanders from afar with your magic?"

"You got it, Mother!" Morgan immediately sheathed her blade and pulled out her Elfire tome from inside her coat. Following her mother, the girl held open the book and began to channel her energy until she could get a clearer shot, embers crackling out of her fingers.

"Now, Morgan!"

The girl held her hand high above her head, then whipped her arm downwards at her target and launched a blazing fireball from her open palm. The burst of magic struck one of the Deadlords in its side, throwing it off its horse and down onto the ground.

"I did it, Mother!" She exclaimed excitedly.

"Good work!" Lucina smiled at the accomplishment before realizing that the creature hadn't yet given up.

Retrieving its deadly lance, the Deadlord stumbled back to its feet despite its terrible burns and remounted its horse. Turning its neck around with a crack, the creature found its attacker and hissed with rage. Spurring its mount, it began to charge Lucina and Morgan with spear outstretched.

"Here it comes, Morgan!" Lucina shouted. "Stay back! Its spear is a holy weapon! You won't be able to counter it with your regular sword alone!"

"I'm not going to leave you to fight it alone, Mother!" She replied back, firing another burst of magic at the creature in an attempt to ward it off.

"Just don't get too close to it!" Lucina warned, and then rushed ahead to meet their attacker before it could come within attacking reach of Morgan. She locked weapons with the Deadlord, each attempting to overpower the other for a brief moment before the creature turned to make another pass. Morgan threw out another fireball, which narrowly missed her target and sailed over its head. The creature hissed and charged again, this time diverting its attention to its smaller opponent.

"Morgan!" Lucina cried, rushing to the girl's side as fast as she could.

The Deadlord however reached Morgan before she did, and it thrust its weapon outwards to impale her chest. Immediately closing her tome and taking a defensive role, Morgan dropped low to the ground and rolled underneath the fatal attack. The Deadlord roared in frustration and held its spear poised to strike again, only for Lucina to strike it aside with Falchion.

"Morgan, are you okay?"

"Mother, watch out!"

The creature reared up on its horse, initiating another attack while Lucina was distracted. Swinging its spear downwards, the Deadlord caught Lucina off guard with a powerful strike and pried Falchion from her hands as she attempted to defend herself. The sword flew out of her reach and clattered to the ground a few feet away. Lucina attempted to make a dash for her weapon, but the creature intercepted her path and forced her to step away.

"Mother!"

Lucina kept her arms close to her face to guard herself, slowly retreating as the Deadlord advanced. It feigned an attack, forcing Lucina to roll out of the way and right into its trap. The creature held its weapon up and struck again. Lucina heard a shout, and the Deadlord's assault halted mid-way through the air. When she looked up, Morgan was standing over her, Falchion grasped in both of the girl's hands and impaled in the creature's chest. The Deadlord toppled off its horse, slipping off of Falchion's blade, and disappeared with a small explosion as it struck the ground.

"Morgan..." Lucina's jaw dropped open in shock. "You can wield Falchion..."

"Yeah... I guess... I can..." the girl sputtered. "I didn't think... I could... the other day. I was... hesitant... so the sword... wasn't sharp... for me..." She suddenly dropped the sword to the ground beside her and fell to her knees, wincing in agony.

"Morgan!" Lucina screamed, leaping up onto her feet and catching her daughter in her arms before she slumped to the ground. "Oh gods, oh gods..."

"It got my leg... real good, Mother," Morgan struggled to speak over the pain. "It hurts..." Lucina cradled the girl in her lap and lifted her leg off the sandy earth to reveal a sizable gash in her right thigh. "Remember, Mother?" Morgan asked weakly, attempting a small smile. "What I... said before... when you found me? I said... I would have to save you... a second time. Now... we can be... even..." Her eyes went wide with fear. "It hurts, Mother..." she repeated. "Am... am I going... to die? I... I don't want to die yet. Not until I see... Father... one last time..."

"No... No!" Lucina shouted, becoming angry. "You are not going to die on my watch!" She hoisted the girl up into her

arms, scanning the battlefield desperately for a medic. "Brady!" she screamed, projecting her voice as best she could. "Brady! I need you here right now!"

"Whatzat?" The scar-faced man turned to search for the sound of her voice. He shifted the weight of the injured man who was using his shoulder for support around so he could see. "Lucina! What's the matter?"

"Brady! I need your help! Please!" Lucina motioned to Morgan in her arms.

"I'm comin'! Don't worry none!" Brady shouted back, trying to run over to her before realizing the soldier he was assisting couldn't keep his pace. He slipped his arm out from behind the man's neck and took a step away to better adjust himself.

"Please! Don't leave me!" the soldier begged, panic flashing in his eyes.

"I ain't leaving ya! Why on earth would I ever do somethin' like that?" Brady scolded. "I'm here to help ya, not to leave ya for the buzzards! I'm just gonna... carry ya!" He paused as he hoisted the man up over his shoulder with one arm, and then he began to run again in Lucina's direction. She attempted to carry Morgan over to him, but the girl was admittedly too heavy for her to lift for that long.

A Risen wielding an axe sprung up between them, and it began to charge Brady once it saw that he was unarmed. The man glared at the Risen with such an intimidating face that Lucina thought she saw it even flinch. "Hey! I'm tryin' to help my friends, you hear! Beat it!" he yelled. The creature didn't heed the warning and brought a sluggish axe swing down on him, which he managed to sidestep even with the man on the shoulder. "Get outta my way, trash!" he cried, raising his healing staff above his head and smashing it down into the creature's skull with brute force, sending it sprawling to the ground. Brady stepped over the Risen and continued on his way, finally reaching the spot where Lucina still clutched on to her daughter.

"Lucina, what's the matt... Oh geez..." he grunted, eye catching Morgan's wound.

"Brady, can you heal her? Please tell me it's nothing serious!" Lucina begged.

"I don't think it's broken or nothin'... That's good at least," Brady crouched down to get a closer look. "Yeah, I can heal it. I just have to get her back to camp first. I'm gonna need some more supplies."

"How can I help?"

"Can you carry her? I already got this guy..."

"I'll try," Lucina attempted to lift Morgan up, but her own legs were still shaking from the sudden fright and she stumbled.

Brady clenched his teeth. "Just give her to me! She's too heavy for ya!"

"But you can't carry them both!"

"Yes I can!" the man insisted. "It's either that or we all croak out here! Take my staff, will ya?" Lucina gently offered Morgan up, and Brady took her in his arm and threw her over his other shoulder. "Urk..." the man stumbled for a moment under the extra weight before standing upright. "Let's go, Lucina!"

Lucina nodded, retrieving Falchion in one hand and Brady's staff in the other. She then followed Brady all the way back to the medical tent on foot, eyes never leaving Morgan's limp form. Bursting into the tent in a rush, the priest carefully laid the other man down onto a little cot and placed Morgan down on the one beside him. He then began to dig through a crate of medicine to search for anything that would be of use. "Here." He handed Morgan a small bottle filled with a concoction of sorts. "Drink this. It'll help with the pain, got it? I'll fix you up in just a bit."

"O...Okay," Morgan agreed, sipping the bottle dry. "Yuck... It tastes gross..."

"Yeah, but it helps," Brady spoke, handing another bottle to the man beside her.

"How do you feel, sweetie?" Lucina put her hand on the girl's arm to let her know she was there.

"I...I feel a little better, Mom..." Morgan replied.

"Thank the gods... You're a lifesaver, Brady..."

"No problem. That's my job, ain't it?" the priest asked, turning to retrieve his staff from Lucina. "I'll work on mendin' your leg up, Morgan. Shouldn't take me too long."

"Thank you Mister Brady," Morgan gave a little smile in appreciation.

"Aww, just Brady is fine, yeah? Mister is for gentlemen, and I sure ain't one of them," the man huffed, holding his staff over Morgan's leg. "Just hold still for a bit." He began to murmur a spell under his breath, and the staff he held started glowing faintly as its healing power slowly began to take effect.

"Brady!"

"What?" Brady growled, breaking his spell at the sudden interruption and turning to the doorway. "Gosh darn it, Ma! I'm in the middle of healing Lucina's kid!"

"I'm your Mother, not your Ma," Maribelle corrected sharply. "And pardon my interruption, I need to warn you that you have to move your patients to a more secure location!"

"What?! I can't move 'em now! They can't walk by themselves yet! Why in Naga's name do I gotta move 'em?"

"One of the Deadlords is charging this camp!" Maribelle explained in a hurry. "Our guards haven't been able to stop it!"

"Preying on the wounded..." Lucina growled in anger, hand finding Falchion. "I'll handle this! Just heal my daughter!"

"Be careful, Mother..."

"Yes," Maribelle agreed. "If you can just hold it off for a minute, help should be on its way."

Lucina nodded to show that she understood before bursting out of the tent, fueled by a powerful protective urge that flooded her entire being. Immediately she singled out the danger: the same Deadlord swordmaster that she had seen crawl its way out of the ground first was running tirelessly towards the medical tents, cutting down the few Ylissean soldiers who tried to stop it. Lucina began to sprint directly at the creature with blade drawn, intercepting its path before it could arrive at camp.

The Deadlord hissed, slowing its run and brandishing its holy blade. Lucina didn't waste any time and leapt at her opponent, performing several furious strikes with Falchion from different angles. The creature effortlessly countered all of them, slipping just out of reach before following up with a vertical swing aimed upwards. Lucina batted the Deadlord's blade out the way and moved in for another attack, barely grazing the creature's shoulder. Its red eyes gleamed intensely and the Risen coughed up foul smoke into Lucina's face, obscuring her vision just long enough for the creature to slam the hilt of its sword down on Lucina's forearm.

Lucina recoiled, shaking out her arm to relieve it from some of the dull pain. Again she clashed swords numerous times with her opponent, and each refused to back down. Lucina brought Falchion back for a forward thrust, which the Deadlord caught on the edge of its sword and pushed aside. Keeping her blade held firm, Lucina pulled back with her other hand and gave the creature a quick jab to the face. It wasn't a tactic Lucina liked to use, but she made an exception just once. There was a cracking sound as the Deadlord's nose bent at a strange angle. The creature backed off for a moment, shaking its head and roaring in anger. Lucina reassumed her defensive stance as it lunged forward again, waving its blade violently.

The creature was showing no sign of tiring. Lucina was finding it more difficult to keep up with its rapid attacks, but nevertheless she held her ground. She managed to embed Falchion into the Deadlord's wounded shoulder again, almost severing its arm. However, the sword got stuck for a brief second, a vulnerability which the Deadlord used in conjunction with its inability to feel the pain to ram into Lucina with a full-body tackle. Lucina lost her footing and slipped to the ground. She tried to raise Falchion up to strike at the Risen's legs, but the creature put its boot down on the flat edge of the blade and pinned it to the earth. Lucina struggled to break free. The Risen was already looming over her, injured arm dangling limply at its side. It raised its blade into the air, and brought the deadly edge down on her vulnerable chest.

Lucina closed her eyes, expecting to feel the excruciating agony that didn't come. Instead, her face suddenly felt warm, and there was a clash of metal and a loud hiss of sparks. Opening her eyes wide, she found that the Deadlord's blade had been stopped inches from her chest, and it was caught in the notch of glowing Levin Sword. Her savior was all too familiar, but her mind refused to trust her eyes.

"R...Robin?"

The man said nothing through clenched teeth, desperately trying to push the opposing blade away from her. His Levin Sword crackled with energy as he strained against his unyielding opponent.

Lucina looked him over again, unable to move or breathe. His clothes were filthy, his pure white hair was caked with a

thin layer of dirt and disheveled even more than usual, and his face looked like he hadn't seen a night of sleep for days, but it was him. It was most definitely him.

"Robin!" she cried again. Finding the strength to kick out the Deadlord's leg with her own, she threw the creature off balance to give Robin the opportunity he needed to push its sword away from her. Robin didn't answer her, but he stepped forward so he stood in between Lucina and the Risen. The creature made an attempt to leap around him, but again he caught its blade with his Levin Sword and shoved it away.

"Stay back!" he shouted, holding the tip of his weapon pointed directly at their attacker. The Deadlord eyed him carefully, and then tried a running leap at him. Robin immediately fired a bolt of lightning from his sword, striking the creature in mid-air and causing it to stumble backwards. He dropped his sword to free both his hands, and then pulled a tome out from inside his coat and held it open. Just as the Deadlord attempted to recover, Robin unleashed a powerful bolt of Thoron from his open palm which pierced the creature directly. Body jostling with electricity, the Deadlord finally collapsed, disappearing in a burst of smoke.

Robin tucked the tome away quickly and reached down to retrieve his sword that he had dropped. He took a nervous glance over his shoulder just to ensure that Lucina was unharmed, and then he took off running into the middle of battlefield.

"Robin! Where are you going?" Lucina desperately cried, scrambling to stand up and run after him. "Come back! I need to talk to you!"

The man made no indication that he had heard her as he slipped through both armies alike to reach the front lines. "Chrom!" he yelled as soon as he saw the Yissean commander.

"Robin?" Chrom tore his sword through an enemy soldier and turned around, face beaming. "It is you!"

"The Deadlords, Chrom! We have to bring them away from the Dragon's Table!"

"What?"

"They want us to go to them! We have to bring them to us! The Dragon's Table is channeling Grima's power through them!" Robin explained without stopping. "They can't summon more soldiers if we lead them away!"

"Right!" Chrom immediately nodded, raising his voice over the chaos. "Shepherds! Fall back! Let them come to us!"

Robin continued darting through the crowd, shouting out commands as he went. A cheer went up amongst the Yissean army as soon as they realized their tactician had returned, and excited shouts of "Robin's back!" filled the air as they began to move away from the Dragon's Table. The man only paused every once and a while to instruct a group of soldiers on what to do before hurrying away to speak with the next regiment. He was making it awfully difficult to reach him...

"Robin!" Lucina shouted again, struggling to push her way through the army. "Let me... through!"

His plan was already going into effect, and gradually he divided the Shepherds into smaller, more compact squadrons. On his signal, a few of these groups snuck around the enemy lines and began to force the Deadlords away from the altar. As Robin predicted, their ability to call upon new soldiers began to wane the farther they were pushed. Bolstered with newfound confidence, the Shepherds shouted out another battle cry and eagerly closed in on their trapped enemies. Periodically there was burst of both light and smoke as the Deadlords were overwhelmed and destroyed by repeated attacks. In mere minutes, the fighting was almost over, with the few straggled groups of Risen remaining slowly being picked off.

As soon as he was sure that the battle was won, Robin hurriedly pushed his way out of the crowd and began to sprint away.

"We did it. Thanks to y..." Chrom paused and looked around, noticing his friend attempting to flee again. "Robin! Get back here!" he demanded, breaking into a run after him as well. "You can't just show up, save the day, and then leave!"

The Shepherds called his name and urged him to return, but Robin didn't stop running. He didn't say another word nor did he look back. He had almost disappeared into the surrounding ruins from where he had come when Lucina seized him by the wrist, stopping him dead in his tracks. Robin strained against her, but Lucina refused to budge. Both didn't say a word, and gradually the rest of the Shepherds caught up and formed a distant semi-circle behind Lucina.

"Robin..." Lucina spoke quietly, trying to control the swell of emotions raging inside her head. "You... don't have... to leave..."

Robin remained silent, and he stood still with his back turned to her. He stopped trying to writhe his way out of her grasp, simply allowing Lucina to clutch his limp hand.

"Why aren't you answering me?" Lucina asked after a few more moments of silence.

The man went rigid at the question.

"Do you not want to speak with me anymore?" Lucina asked again.

"I..." Robin reluctantly replied, still not turning around. "I...I can't stay! I h...have to leave! Y...You were right! I can't!"

"I was wrong, Robin!" Lucina told him with a quivering lip. She had rehearsed what she had wanted to say to him numerous times in the days after he left, so much so that she had memorized an entire speech. But now that he *was* here, she forgot every line. "I've never been more wrong! What I did... What I did was a grave mistake, and I can't apologize to you enough!"

"No! No, you were r...right!" Robin's voice was growing desperate and weak. It wasn't the same sound that Lucina was used to, and just hearing it filled her with fear over what had happened to him while he was away. "Grima... Grima is getting stronger! I can h...hear his voice, see his thoughts... I can't resist him anymore! You were right about me!" he repeated. "I...I'm his weapon! H...He's going to use me... to hurt you... and hurt Chrom... and hurt everybody!"

"Robin... You're shaking..."

"I can't stay here! The voice... His voice! The one in my head! It c...called me here! I couldn't stop it! I've tried to hide from it, but it's everywhere! I j...just saw you being attacked as s...soon I reached this place, so I had to c...come out..." His panicked sentences were beginning to slur together. "Something terrible! Something terrible is going to h...happen in there if I stay! I've seen it! Seen it in a dream! A nightmare!"

"Robin! This isn't you!" Lucina cried. "Please come back!"

"S...stay away from me!" Robin suddenly pulled against Lucina's grip again. "I'm a monster! I'm *his* monster! L...leave me and stop him before... before it's too late!"

"I'm not going to let you run away again!"

"Robin, we need you here!" Chrom stepped out of the crowd and took a step forward.

"C...Chrom! Don't come any closer!" Robin begged. "S...She's right! He's going to make me k...kill you in there! Please leave me!"

"Robin! That isn't going to happen!"

"Yes it will!"

"No, it won't!" Chrom raised his voice, growing angry.

"I s...saw the future! I can't change it!"

"So you think running away from it will save you? Maybe it did happen in Lucina's future. Maybe it happened in other futures. But it's not going to happen now!"

"What happened to changing the future?" Lucina asked, eyes growing watery. "You said so yourself that we could change it!"

"Not we... *You* can, Lucina," Robin's voice fell to almost a whisper, and he trembled as if he would shatter into pieces at the slightest touch. He still didn't show his face. "I can't... Don't you see? I'm destined... to be... a villain... Grima's blood runs through my veins. I can't change that... I can't change who I am..."

Lucina bit her lip and looked to her side for a moment before turning back to him. "I...If that's what you really believe, then there's someone who I'd like for you to meet..."

As Lucina had noticed, Morgan had just left the medical tent and was jogging over to them. "What happened, Mother?" she asked, squirming her way through the crowd. "Did we win? What's everybody doing over here?"

"M...Mother?" Robin stuttered, very slowly turning his head over his shoulder.

"Mother! Where are... you..." Morgan came to halt, staring at the man standing with her mother in disbelief. She dropped the tome she was carrying. "Is that... You're..." Her breathing started to grow rapid, and a huge smile crept its way onto her face. "You're..." She broke into a full-on sprint, slightly hobbling with her still healing leg but too excited to feel any pain. Lucina smiled and released Robin's arm as soon as the girl reached them. "Father!" Morgan cried, leaping into his arms and pulling him into a tight embrace. "Father! It's you! You're back!" She was practically sobbing with joy as she rubbed her face into Robin's shirt. "You're back you're back you're back! Mother and I missed you sooo much!"

Robin looked utterly dumbfounded, and he stood frozen to the spot as the girl gave him a long overdue squeeze. He couldn't speak for a few moments until he finally managed to choke out a question. "Who... who are you? H...how did you get that coat? It looks just like mine..."

"It *is* yours, Father! You gave it to me!" Morgan laughed. "Oh, right! You haven't met me yet! My name is Morgan! I'm your future daughter!"

"My... daughter? L...Lucina said I didn't have a daughter from the future..."

"Well here I am!" Morgan grinned. "And you mean Mother, right?"

"Mother?" Robin looked at Lucina in disbelief, then to Morgan, then back to Lucina. "Y...you're... That's... She's..." he stammered, pointing his finger between the two of them. "She's..."

"She's ours, Robin," Lucina completed his sentence for him and gave a small smile, becoming a little red in the face just from saying it.

"I have Mother's mark in my eye too, Father! Look!" Morgan let go of his chest and pointed into her right eye excitedly.

"The Brand... Your... mother's... brand?"

"Yeah! And I've got yours too, Father!" she told him, holding up her left hand. "I have both!"

"But... But how is that... possible?" Robin asked, turning to Lucina in shock.

"I don't know," Lucina shook her head. "I found her a little while after you left with no memory of anything except you. But she's our daughter, Robin."

"She sure is," Chrom nodded with a grin. "I have a question for you though. How do you think *my* daughter is the mother of *your* daughter?"

"Ahh! Chrom!" Robin was reminded that his friend was still there with them. "I...I don't know! N...nothing like... *that* happened! I swear!" His face was even redder than Lucina's was. "We m...meant to tell you... about us, b...but I didn't know what time..."

"Relax, Robin," Chrom laughed, interrupting him. "I know all about it. Lucina told me. And I've decided I'm going to trust you about not knowing how this girl got here, for now at least."

Robin sighed in relief, tense shoulders gradually relaxing a bit.

"We want you to stay, Robin," Chrom said, warm smile on his face. "You're our ally and our friend. No dragon can change that."

"You are a man of many talents, Robin," Frederick spoke up. "As a knight of the Ylislean royal guard, I would be honored if you would fight beside us in our final battle."

"And you're fun to play pranks with!" Lissa piped in, and then nudged Lon'qu beside her with her elbow.

"You are a... good sparring partner," the man muttered, growing nervous from being put on the spot. "And... my... friend."

The Shepherds began to go around in the circle they had formed, each eagerly chipping in something to say about Robin.

"You were a wonderful matchmaker for my sweet Minerva," Cherche added. "I am eternally grateful for your help." Her wyvern mount let out a roar of agreement.

"You are a friend to my people and an honorary member of the warren," Panne spoke in a powerful voice.

"And you keep us safe!" Yarne peeped timidly from behind her.

Lucina watched Robin's face as the Shepherds each spoke, and the smile that was growing on his face made her want to go around and personally thank every member of the entire army.

"Robin is very good friend to swellword like Gregor," the older man let out a hearty chuckle. "Had many good laughs telling stories by campfire, yes?"

"You believed in me when other folks didn't!" Donnel raised his fist in the air.

"And you're my father, which makes you the coolest!" Morgan beamed. "I want to be just like you when I grow up! You're my hero, Dad!"

Robin reached up to wipe his eyes, but not before a tear ran down his cheek. Lucina didn't think that she had ever seen him cry before, and he looked like he was trying hard to restrain it. "Thank you... Thank you all..." He couldn't remove the smile on his face even if he tried.

"Now do you get it, Robin? You're one of us," Chrom said. "You'll always be a part of our family. And speaking of that... I think there's one more person who has something to say to you, doesn't she?" He clapped a hand on Lucina's shoulder.

All eyes were on her again, but Lucina chose to not let them bother her. "Robin..." she began slowly. "I know what I tried to do to you was terrible, and you... don't have to forgive me if you can't bring yourself to... But I... I just need to tell you that you're an amazing person, and you've shown me... and made me feel things that I never thought I would ever experience." She blushed fiercely as she gazed deeper into Robin's eyes. "I need to tell you... how grateful I am to have met you. And... And you're the one and only man that I love, if that means anything to you anymore..."

"Lucina..." Robin took a step closer to her, pulling her into a tight embrace. "It means everything to me."

She returned his embrace eagerly, allowing a few tears to fall across her face. He hadn't seen a bath for days, but Lucina couldn't care less. He had come back, and that was all that mattered. "I missed you..."

"I missed you more than you could ever know..."

"Yay!" Morgan snuck in beside them and wrapped her arms around both her parents. "Mother and Father are back together!"

Robin glanced over at the girl, and he started to laugh. It was the sound that Lucina had missed most of all. He removed one arm from around Lucina and wrapped Morgan into the embrace as well. "I have a daughter..." he said at last, looking up at his friend a few feet away. "Did you hear that, Chrom? I have a daughter! Isn't that wonderful?"

"I told you he would be happy to see you," Lucina reminded Morgan with a laugh.

"Ha! You were right, Mother!" Morgan grinned, and then paused as she scrunched up her nose. "I'm going to have to say this, Father... You're all dirty..." she giggled. "You should get washed up!"

"Sorry..." Robin chuckled as he gradually released the two from his arms. "I'll get right on that when I can..."

The ground suddenly shuttered violently for a moment, and the Dragon's Table began to radiate more energy than it had before.

"But right now there's a war to be won," Chrom grimaced. "Let's go, Shepherds!"

Robin hesitated, and the happy expression he had just worn quickly reverted back into one of fear. "T...The ritual... It's almost complete!" His voice as well lost confidence again. "Lucina... Y...You could still leave me here. I c...can't hurt anyone if I stay behind."

"I don't want to leave to behind," Lucina responded softly. "And you aren't going to hurt anyone, Robin."

Robin glanced up at her solemnly, and then looked down to his daughter beside him. "Okay..." He put on a weak smile. "W...We have a future to save, don't we?"

The triumphant return! I told you guys it would happen soon! Robin couldn't miss the battle from one of my favorite chapters, aka the one where you fight powerful generals and take their cool weapons all while listening to one of the best tracks in the game. I decided to give the Deadlords the power to summon a Risen army, because the entire Ylissean army fighting twelve enemies didn't seem too fair.

Robin's mental state isn't the same from how it used to be, isn't it? The more powerful Grima becomes, the more he's being pushed off the edge of sanity. We'll see more of what he's been going through in the upcoming chapters. Fortunately he's back with both his literal and metaphorical families! I thought it would be sweet for all the Shepherds to say something encouraging to Robin to welcome him home one by one, just like they did to Chrom after Emmeryn died.

If you're wondering why Robin didn't join the fighting earlier when the Shepherds were getting beaten, he actually just arrives at the battlefield when Lucina is attacked. It's not like he's been waiting there for a while watching them. He also *had* to be the one to save Lucina, because what better entrance could he have than leaping in at the very last second to save the princess?

And yes, Morgan actually *can* wield Falchion! In Lucina's sibling supports, her brother/sister thinks that he/she just missed the log even though it was actually cut in two. In this instance, Morgan legitimately couldn't cut the log at first because she was hesitant and didn't have enough confidence in her herself. I would surmise that if Falchion determines who is worthy to use it, it would "know" in a way that she wasn't ready, and that's why it wasn't sharp before. When she picks it up and uses it to defend her mother, the sword recognizes her as a noble person and then deems her worthy.

Anyways, the Deadlord-slaying family is back in action and ready to challenge some serious fate! What did you guys think of the super-long chapter? Did Robin, Lucina, and Morgan have the reunion you wanted? The confrontation in the Dragon's Table is next!

Chapter 19: Something Broken

Ugh, sorry that this is so late! I've had so much to do regarding work and school this month, so I wasn't able to get this chapter up until today... It also turned out to be even longer than the last chapter, so I hope the wait was well worth it!

In which Robin discovers a dark prophecy and the Shepherds confront the leader of the Grimleal

Chapter 19 – Something Broken

"Lucina, whatever happens in there..."

"We're going to succeed, Robin. All of us will be there to fight Grima too, and I'll stay right beside you the whole time if you want."

"I...I would like that." A smile flickered across Robin's tired face before vanishing as quickly as it had come. "B...But that wasn't what I was going to ask you."

"Hmm?"

The Dragon's Table pulsed with an intense flash of light, and Robin flinched with discomfort before continuing. "It's... about what *will* happen if my father gains control over me like he did before..."

"That won't happen again," Lucina told him, instinctively grasping her sheathed blade's hilt in confidence. "If Validar tries to do that to you again, I'll cut him down before he can lift a finger." She paused, feeling strangely guilty for what she had just said. "O...oh! I'm sorry, Robin... Validar may be our enemy, but he *is* still your father. I shouldn't have been so blunt." She peered over at Chrom, the very man who she had come to the past to save. "Especially given my position..."

"Even if I am bound to Validar by blood, he's no father to me," Robin frowned. "Besides, stopping him at any cost is the reason that we're here, isn't it?"

"I know that. I just thought you were going to say that you were feeling uncomfortable about having to face him," Lucina explained. "Even if they were as evil as Validar, I don't think I would be able to face them in combat either."

"No, that isn't it... I won't hesitate to cut him down if I get the chance. I was going to ask you... to promise me something." Robin's expression was serious, but his eyes were sad. "If he does take over my mind, I need you to promise that you'll cut me down immediately."

Lucina looked at him with horror, taken completely off-guard. "What!? You can't possibly ask me to promise you that!"

"You almost were able to that night..."

"No!" Lucina's hands tightened into fists. "I accused you of a crime you didn't commit, and in doing so I was nothing but a hypocrite! I speak about change yet I acted as if you couldn't. Do you know how many times I've woken up in the middle of the night drenched in a cold sweat, haunted by visions of what I could have done?"

"I know it's a lot to ask of you, but-"

"And what I tried to do wasn't even for the future!" Lucina interrupted him, and then corrected herself. "Well, it was... But there was something else! I thought that everything you had done for me was all just a ruse, and I just got so... angry..." She looked down at her feet in shame. "I thought I would never stoop so low to allow such primal impulses to consume me, but I was weaker than I thought, and it was terrifying... But even after everything, I knew that no matter how much I tried I could never bring myself to kill you. No matter how angry I felt."

"But those things I said..." Robin murmured in protest. "I...I wasn't lying when I said that nothing I had done ever had the intention of breaking you, nor was I lying when I said that I would give my life for you or for Chrom. I would have gladly fallen on your blade that night if you willed it. But... there was something else. Another voice. A part of me that didn't want to d...die. That part of me tried to disarm you, force you to put down your weapon. Say things in such a way that they would sting your consciousness." He paused, wincing again as the altar in front of them pulsed with power. "I need to warn you that I may try and do that again if I fall under his influence. No matter what I say to you, how much I beg you to spare me, even if I burst into tears on my knees, you cannot hesitate to strike me down."

"Robin, why do you not understand? I'll never even think about trying to kill you again!"

"Lucina, if I fall to my father again in there, I'll already be gone... The Robin that you know won't be around anymore. I can feel it, and I've seen it in my nightmares," Robin explained nervously. "I'll fight him with everything that I have, but in case that isn't enough... If you even take one second to hesitate, then... then we'll have lost the future."

"But Robin..."

"I can't have Grima come to this world too. You know better than I do. The horrible events of your future cannot be allowed to happen again!"

"..."

"Lucina, can I ask you to do this for me?"

She took one look at his expression and immediately wished she hadn't. "Damn you and that face of yours..." she muttered, growing frustrated that she couldn't argue with him. "I...If there's absolutely... no other way... then I'll t...try to heed your... request... But you can be sure that I'll do everything in *my* power to prevent that from happening!"

"That's all I'm asking," Robin tried to give a reassuring smile as they began to walk up the steps into the altar. "I...It shouldn't come to that, but just in case it does."

"Validar is going to have to get through me first!"

"And me! Sorry I'm late, Father! Brady just wanted to look at my leg again to make sure it was okay." Morgan squirmed her way through the rest of the Shepherds and hurried to Robin's side. "All of the people who have been hurting you are in for a world of pain, Father!" She was making her best attempt to sound threatening, but coming from her, it truthfully was having the adverse effect. "Anyone who tries to get to you will have to answer to *my* blade once Mother is finished with them!"

"I'm in good hands," Robin grinned.

"You are," Lucina added. "Even I would be a little nervous if I got on the wrong end of her sword. She's almost as good as I am."

"Yeah, Father! I fight just like Mother! We did a lot of sparring together, and she taught me a lot!" Morgan's determined face was immediately replaced by one of childlike eagerness. She couldn't have been more excited to tell her father everything she had learned. "Mother picked out my blade, and then she showed me all her attack moves and stuff, and guess what, Father? I can wield Mother's sword too!"

"You can wield Falchion?" Robin's eyes widened in surprise. "But wouldn't my blood prevent that?"

"I guess not! I didn't think I could use it the other day, but I found out just now that I can! I could show you if you want, Father."

"I'm not sure if your mother would feel comfortable without her sword right now," Robin told her, reaching up with one hand to tousle her hair. "But I'm eager to see what you can do, kiddo."

"I'll definitely make you proud, Father!" Morgan grinned.

"Robin!" Chrom called, beckoning him over.

"What do you need, Chrom?" Robin asked, walking up to him.

"This is it..." The other man looked skywards at the clouds circling the altar. "I wanted to make sure you were ready."

"As ready as I'll ever be..." Robin murmured, pushing some of his matted hair off his forehead nervously. "I...I can't run from my father anymore. I need to face him and put an end to this once and for all."

"And it's not just you. You know that, right?" Chrom asked. "The Shepherds and I will fight by your side."

"Yes, I know..."

"Good. Then let's make haste, shall we?" Taking a deep breath, Chrom stepped into the Dragon's Table with the rest of the army close behind. Inside, they were met with a long hallway that was coated in ancient inscriptions and pictures.

Lucina kept one eye trained on Robin and the other on Morgan the entire time. The further they walked into the altar, the more uncomfortable both of them seemed to become. Several times he looked tempted to put a hand to his head in

discomfort, but he continued to repress the urge to do so. Lucina was sure that he was doing it so no one would have to worry about him, but he wasn't fooling her anymore. She made sure to stay within his range of vision, at the very least just to reassure him that she was still there.

Gradually, Robin shuffled closer to one of the walls, and as he walked he slowly dragged his fingers along the etchings and to explore every indentation in the stone.

"What are you doing, Robin?" Chrom asked. "Do you know what these inscriptions mean?"

"They're... foreshadowing Grima's resurrection..." Robin replied, not taking his eyes from the wall. Even though the writing that accompanied the pictures was unidentifiable, Robin seemed to be able to interpret their meaning through touch alone. He pointed at a drawing behind him which appeared to portray some monster being forced into the earth, surrounded by figures in mourning. "That one shows Grima being sealed away by the first exalt... The people around him are Grimleal..." He paused, staring carefully at the writing as we walked. "This keeps mentioning the Fire Emblem. Something along of lines of how it was misused... And the writer keeps repeating some phrase about the dual nature of the Emblem. I don't know what that means though."

He continued, stopping in front of a complete picture of the Fell Dragon. "This is Grima..." he spoke quietly. "The writing here says that Grima's true heir shall receive his most sacred gift..."

"Hmm..." Chrom put his hand to his chin as he examined the drawing before turning to find that they had reached the end of the hallway. "Wait... A dead end?" He asked incredulously, staring at blank wall in front of him. "But that can't be possible! There was no other way in!"

"You're right," Morgan agreed. "There's a room on the other side of this wall. I don't know how we can open it though..."

"I can try," Robin suggested, stepping in front of Chrom. As he had done with the writing, he slowly reached out and touched his fingertips to the wall. The moment he touched it, Robin yelped and recoiled his hand as if he had been burned. The six-eyed symbol of Grima glowed faintly on the wall, which then slid aside to reveal the heart of the structure: a massive open room with a towering ceiling supported by pillars.

The Plegian king stood at the opposite end, back turned towards the Shepherds and facing a polished stone statue of the Fell Dragon. Occasionally bolts of purple lightning shot out of the effigy and writhed their way through the air until disappearing up in the ceiling, emitting a powerful flash of light upon contact. Upon closer inspection, Lucina saw the Fire Emblem embedded in the wall underneath the statue, now complete with all five of its Gemstones.

"Validar!" Chrom yelled from across the room. "Stop this madness!"

"Chrom... Aversa informed me that you and your army wanted to be the first in line to have your souls devoured. How very nice of you," Validar spoke, folding his hands behind his back without turning around. "You won't have to wait much longer, I assure you. The final step of the ritual is soon approaching..."

"It may be approaching, but it will never come!" Chrom growled. "Give up, Validar! We've returned your mighty Deadlords to the earth where they belong, and now it's time for you to do the same!"

"Heheheh... You speak as if victory is within your grasp. Do you truly believe you have the upper hand?" The Plegian king retrieved a dark tome that looked even more ancient than Aversa's from a raised slab of rock before turning to face the Shepherds. "I have the completed Fire Emblem, and all the Grimleal in Plegia have set Grima's Table. The Awakening is not only restricted to Naga, you know; it has the power to revive Grima as well! You have nothing over me!"

"Wrong!" Chrom rebutted, taking a step forward. "We have the ties that bind us together and the trust we share, and those are stronger than any power that you could hope to use to stop us! No one is by your side now, not even your loyal minion Aversa. You may have thousands of Grimleal at your disposal, but in the end you stand alone!"

"Are the feelings you have towards one another stronger than a god?" Validar asked mockingly. "You think your bonds make you strong, but they restrain you! They make you too reliant on one another for support and hold you back from achieving greater power. When compared to Grima's might, they are little more than leaves in the wind! No matter how powerful you believe them to be, our god can shatter them one at a time!"

"Then we'll have to show you how powerful we are by shattering your hope of Grima returning to this world!"

"You still have yet to realize that coming here has doomed you all," Validar responded with a devilish grin. "There is *one* more thing that I require to complete the ritual, and you have so kindly brought him here. While Grima may be a god, he still requires a mortal host in order to be revived." He beckoned with a gnarly finger. "Come to me, Robin. Fulfill your

destiny as Grima's true heir!"

"Grima's true heir..." Robin repeated in horror. "I...I'm the person that the writings in the corridor prophesized?"

"Now you are finally beginning to understand, my son. How do you think that you were able to read those inscriptions? Or open the sealed door to the Dragon's Table by touch alone? It is Grima inside of you! He longs to be free!"

"That's impossible... I've had Grima within me all this time?" Robin staggered backwards.

"Robin, have you known about this?" Chrom asked, unable to believe the Plegian man's words.

"I... N...no..."

"Heh heh," Validar chuckled. "There's proof for you, prince! You say that your bond with your closest companion is built on trust, but I'm sorry to say that he's lying to you! I believe Robin has known for quite a long time what he is meant to become."

"You're the one who's lying!" Chrom shouted back. "Robin, tell me he's lying!"

"You and I share the same blood, Robin. The fell dragon's sacred blood!" Validar spoke again. "You've known, haven't you? Grima's soul has slumbered inside of you, ever since you were born!"

"Robin... Tell this dastard he's nothing but lies right now!" Chrom looked over at his friend for support, but Robin only placed a hand to his forehead and grimaced.

"He's... He's not... entirely... wrong," he murmured sadly.

"What?"

"E...Ever since Lucina joined us on Carrion Isle, I've... felt something strange deep within my being..." Robin stammered. "I chose to i...ignore it, refused to accept it, but somehow I knew... deep down... that my affliction with Grima was p...powerful..."

"Powerful is an understatement," Validar remarked. "You are not merely afflicted with Grima... You ARE Grima! It took a millennia for the Grimleal to create the one true heir to the Fell Dragon, and you are the result of all those years of work! It was not enough to just have his pure blood; if that was the case then Grima would have been resurrected hundreds of years ago," the man continued to explain. "The prophecy foretold of one vessel that would be far more worthy than any of the others. My father was unable to accept Grima's most sacred gift, and neither was I. From the moment you were born the Grimleal knew that *you* were the one who held the most vital piece to Grima's reawakening!"

"Robin... You've known?" Lucina asked in a weak voice. "All of it?"

"N...Not everything... but pieces..."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I...I was afraid to." Robin looked away in shame. "I t...thought that if you all knew the kind of p...person I was meant to be, then you would shun me. L...leave me behind. I was selfish for not saying anything, b...but I wanted to stay with you all. Even if it was j...just for a little while longer. Even if it would make you all h...hate me more once you found out..."

"But Robin, we could have helped you!" Lucina insisted.

"Lucina, you have a mission to protect the future at all costs, and I...I know that you won't let anything stand between you and your goals," Robin replied. "If I told you that I felt connected to Grima in any way... I knew that no matter what you said that you would never feel the same way for me that I do for you. I just couldn't bring myself to tell you, and I'm sorry..."

"You were only delaying the inevitable, my son. Now that they know the truth, these Ylisseans will never like accept you, just like you believed," Validar grinned. "Your presence however will be *much* more appreciated here in Plegia where you are to serve as the holy vessel to our god!"

"No! Robin, you heard all of the Shepherds! We want you here!" Lucina protested.

"Come and stand by my side, Robin!"

"Enough!" Chrom shouted. "Robin is one of us, Validar, and he always will be! No matter who your warped prophecy says he is! We'll be taking the Fire Emblem back now and putting an end to you, won't we Robin? ...Robin?"

"C...Chrom... I don't know..."

"You see? He knows that your resistance to the Fell Dragon is useless. Grima's awakening cannot be stopped now, and his power that runs through the Dragon's Table has intensified my own! You cannot possibly hope to stop me!"

Robin looked to Chrom beside him, and then glanced behind him to meet the eyes of all the Shepherds, gaze stopping at Lucina and Morgan. "Chrom is right..." he declared after a brief moment of silence. "For my friends and my family... I'll fight to stop you... or I'll die trying..."

"A poor decision," Validar hissed. "We'll see how well your bonds can last you against Grima's will... when you're alone!" Immediately he flipped open the tome he was carrying and cast a spell, causing a wall of shadowy energy to appear and cut the room in two.

"No!" Lucina cried, making an attempt to dash to Robin's side before the wall could fully materialize, but it was too late. She was stuck on the other side of the room, and she couldn't make it to her father or Robin. *I said I would stay by his side the whole time!* Lucina placed both of her palms against the wall, which despite being made of energy felt like touching cold stone, in a futile attempt to push her way through. "Robin!"

"Father!" Morgan exclaimed weakly, attempting to help her mother break through. "We're coming, Father!" She had been uncharacteristically quiet, and it was clear that something about this place bothered her immensely.

Robin in turn placed his own hands against the barrier from the other side, looking back at the two with fear in his eyes. "Lucina, we can't get through!" he called desperately.

"As long as the barrier stands, no one else will be able to reach us!" Validar declared with glee. He motioned with a flick of his hand, raising his voice. "Come, my loyal Grimleal! Destroy the Ylissean army and please your god!"

At the command, Plegian soldiers emerged from the shadows and began to close in from all sides. The Shepherds tightened their formation into a large cluster so they could all protect each other's backs, and the sounds of weapons being drawn on both sides filled the stale air. Lucina withdrew her hands from the barrier and unsheathed Falchion for battle, nervously glancing between Robin and her approaching attackers. She didn't want to leave him, but she wasn't about to have that choice in a minute.

"You'll have to face your fate alone!" Validar laughed.

"Damn it..." Chrom muttered under his breath, unsheathing his sword. "Let's go, Robin! We'll put a stop to this!"

With a great amount of effort, Robin broke his gaze from Lucina's and pulled his Thoron tome out of his coat. "R...Right! We can do it!"

"Validar! You die today!" Chrom yelled in anger, pulling back Falchion and charging the man at full sprint.

The Plegian king opened his tome and held his other hand high into the air, gathering the magic it was providing him. The statue of Grima behind him began to glow faintly, and then it shot out another lightning bolt directly into the sphere of energy Validar was forming on his fingertips. With the power of the Dragon's Table to amplify it, the magic began to hiss and crackle as it grew exponentially larger. The moment Chrom moved into range, Validar brought down his arm and released the dark energy as numerous bursts of lighting akin to the one that fueled the attack.

Chrom held up Falchion in front of him in a defensive posture, catching the magic on the blade just before it could strike his body. He grunted in strain as the force of the attack caused him to slide backwards, but he refused to drop his stance and fought to push the magic back.

"Heheheh... Now do you feel what you are up against, little prince?" Validar cackled, keeping his magic trained on Chrom with full force. "Look how you struggle, and this is but a mere fraction of Grima's power that he has generously bestowed upon me! I-" Validar halted mid-sentence and vanished just before a bolt of Thoron tore through the spot where he had just been standing. His magical assault ceased for a moment and the dark energy dissipated into the air, allowing Chrom to regain his posture.

"Thanks for that," Chrom called.

Robin nodded in recognition and shook the lingering sparks from his right hand.

The Plegian king materialized a few feet away from the statue and glared at Robin angrily. "Why do you still believe that your destiny can be altered, my son?" he scoffed. "You *are* the Fell Dragon! That will never change! Leave these foolish Ylisseans! Your rightful place is in Plegia!"

"That may be so... I may not be able to change who I am..." Robin gritted his teeth. "But I choose to stand beside Chrom, and nothing you can say will shake my resolve!" Holding out his arm, he fired another stream of lightning magic out of his palm at the man, who again teleported away in a cloud of smoke.

Validar raised his hand and gathered more energy from the Dragon's Table as he had done earlier. "We shall see..." he growled. "Perhaps if you experience more of Grima's power you'll be begging me to convert sides!" With a shout he released a burst of dark lightning, noticeably more restrained than the one he had used before but still powerful enough to wound Robin.

Chrom ran in between them, holding up Falchion to block the attack and accumulate the magic on the blade instead. He then swung the sword downwards away from him, reflecting the energy into the floor a few yards away. The dark lightning exploded the moment it collided with the stone, sending large chunks of tile spraying up into the air.

"Little pest..." Validar hissed as Chrom turned around to meet up with Robin and join forces.

Lucina watched their battle from behind the barrier helplessly; there was no way that she was able to join them. Robin and her father made a formidable team, but Validar was fighting them with Grima's power and clearly had the upper hand in terms of strength alone. If either one of them failed to evade just one attack, the fight for the future had an almost certain chance of failure...

"Mother! Here they come!" Morgan warned, snapping Lucina out of her muse and putting her on high alert. Together with weapons drawn they moved closer to the rest of the army for protection.

"This is what we've been fighting for!" Lucina yelled. "For the future!"

The Shepherds echoed her cry in determination and rushed ahead to clash blades with the enemy. Their Grimleal attackers made no battle cry as they charged forward, and they seemed as if they were under the same trance that afflicted the Plegian villagers outside the Dragon's Table. From the moment they began to fight, Lucina recognized that their movements were more akin to those of Risen soldiers, skilled but unnatural. The Shepherds could have just as well been fighting the Deadlords' army again.

Lucina tore through the onslaught, cleaving Falchion through any enemy troops who managed to slip by Morgan's relentless blasts of magic. She soon found that she had to do so more swiftly than usual, for just like the Risen these Grimleal seemed to be either slow to feel pain or immune to it entirely. If her first strike wasn't fatal, her opponent paid no heed to it and continued to attack.

She countered a sudden downward swing of a longsword with the flat edge of Falchion's blade, quickly twisting her grip around on her sword's hilt to pry the weapon out of the Plegian's hands. Lucina thrust Falchion forward, aiming for the man's chest, but he sidestepped her strike and moved towards his dropped sword. In the moment he bent down to retrieve it, Lucina brought Falchion down hard over his back, cutting right through the straps of his armor and sending him sprawling to the stone ground.

Hearing the loud clatter of his steps before she saw him, Lucina stood upright and turned to lock blades with an armored Grimleal general. She deflected the attack and countered a series of several more violent strikes before assuming the offensive. Instead of parrying his next attack like the man predicted, Lucina slipped out of his reach as he swung and then slashed at his arm with her blade. The armor however was too heavy for even Falchion to easily cut through, and her swing slid off it leaving no more than a deep scratch. Just as she began to make the split second decision of how to follow up her attack, one of Morgan's fireballs blazed past dangerously close to her face and struck the man in the side. His large weight took the force of the attack and prevented him from falling over, but his armor was glowing white with heat from where Morgan had struck it and was beginning to melt off. Lucina used the vulnerability to her advantage, driving Falchion through the molten metal and impaling the Grimleal on the inside.

"It worked!" Morgan declared triumphantly. "And it was just close enough that I didn't hit you at all, Mother."

"Maybe a little too close for my liking," Lucina muttered in reply, yanking her blade from the man's body. "But good job." She began to charge towards another group of Plegians who were giving some of the Shepherds a difficult time, but she stopped in her tracks and turned around when she heard Validar speak again.

"Still you resist his call, foolish boy! Desperately you cling to these people even now in the heart of Grima's most sacred place!" The Plegian king growled at Robin with a curled lip. "The Fell Dragon must be freed, even if I must tear him from your mind itself!" He held his hand outstretched, and his eyes narrowed as he slowly began to close his fingers into a fist.

"No!" Lucina cried, changing her course and running back to the barrier with Morgan close behind her. "Robin! Stay

strong! Don't let him in!"

Robin took a few steps backwards, shaking his head and nervously muttering to himself. "...No... Don't..." With his free hand he slowly reached up and pressed his fingers to his forehead, fear becoming evident in his voice. "Stop it... I don't want-"

Validar immediately clenched his hand tightly and Robin let out a cry of pain, dropping his Thoron tome to the ground. Clutching his head with both hands, he hunched over and shouted again. At the same time, Morgan winced and squeezed her eyes shut. Lucina clutched the girl's arm in her free hand, but there was little else she could do. Just like Robin, she appeared to be experiencing the same effects of the mental attack, but it was clear that Robin was faring far worse.

"Robin!" Chrom shouted, sprinting to return to his friend's side. "No! Not now!"

"I refuse to allow you to interfere again!" Validar hissed, holding his dark tome open and releasing another powerful blast of lightning.

Chrom was forced to stop his approach to protect himself with Falchion, and like he had done before tried to throw the attack off to the side. The Plegian king however held the magic strong, and Chrom had to divert all of his strength and willpower to hold it back. "Stop Validar! Look at what you're doing to him!"

The man ignored Chrom's protests, keeping his attack continuously trained on him while he shifted all attention back on his son.

Robin was visibly shaking now, and again he moaned in agony.

"Hgh..." Morgan grunted through clenched teeth. "D...Do something, Mother!"

"I...I don't know what I can do!"

"P...Please help F...Father!" Morgan stammered. "Please!"

"Robin!" Lucina called as loud as she could manage in the desperate hope that he could still hear her. "L...Listen to me! Don't let him control you!" She pressed her palms up against the barrier as she spoke. "Y...You can fight him! I know you can! Please listen!"

Robin flinched at the sound of her voice, not taking his hands from his head but briefly stopping his moaning for just a second before a harsh glare from Validar caused him to resume. Morgan's eyes however shot open and she met Lucina's gaze in realization.

"M...Mother! Do that again!"

"What did I do?"

"Just talk! Keep talking to him!"

"O...Okay!" Lucina nodded frantically, trying to come up with anything to say to him that could possibly help. "Robin, you have to resist it! Don't believe anything he tries to tell you! No matter what he says, you'll always belong with us!"

Validar's eyes began to narrow, and Lucina could only assume that he was beginning to become frustrated. "They don't want you..." he growled. "This girl is nothing but full of lies and feels nothing but hatred towards you! Don't you remember how she tried to murder you in cold blood?"

"Lucina... She..."

"We *do* want you, Robin! The Shepherds all missed you! I missed you!" Lucina protested. "I shouldn't have done what I did!"

"You're a Fell Blood mixed with a group of Naga's sniveling servants! She tried to kill you because you don't fit in with them!"

"No, Robin! I tried to kill you because I was scared! I was scared of what might happen if I didn't, if the future would be lost, and if you were really on Grima's side. But I haven't told you yet why else! I was scared about what I really felt for you, and I didn't want to truly embrace those feelings because I had never known them before! I was lying to myself, but now I can tell you with complete certainty what I feel about you! Do want to hear it?" Lucina asked. "Please turn around so I can

see your face!"

"You don't want to turn around..." Validar commanded hypnotically, trying to assert his dominance.

"I... I..."

"Robin, please turn around! I'm not the kind of person who's good with these things, so I might only be able to say this just one time in front of everyone, and I want to say it to your face!"

"You... don't want... to turn... around!"

"I... I... do..." Robin weakly responded, repeating it again to assure himself that it was truly what he wanted. "I do..." Forcing his hands down off of his head, he took a few staggered steps and turned around slightly, just enough that he could meet Lucina's gaze. His auburn eyes that she was so used to seeing being filled with warmth and optimism were plagued by terror, but he kept them focused on her.

"Are you ready? Because here it goes..." Lucina took a breath in a futile attempt to calm herself before continuing. "The few days after you left, I tried to figure out what it was exactly about you that made me feel these things, and I've figured it out. I was scared because of how much I love you, Robin! I love you so much that every single thing we do together makes me lie awake in bed at night and think about how much I enjoyed spending that time with you!" Lucina may have let a few tears fall if she wasn't so terrified for him. "When I'm with you, I just feel so... happy! I know it may sound like I'm making this up because it's what anyone might say, but I have to tell you because it's the truth! I was scared every time I was around you because I didn't know what real happiness felt like, but now that I know what it is I want to experience it again! Now my biggest fear is that I won't be able to anymore! Do you remember when you said that you would help me with my fears? I need you now to help me with this one!"

"No!" Validar's control seemed to be slipping. "Don't believe her! You know more than anyone that there is no place for such petty emotions like love in Grima's kingdom! Love is nothing!"

"T...Then I..." Robin spoke, confidence slowly beginning to become noticeable in his voice. "I'm feeling... a whole lot of nothing right now."

"What!?"

"I love her," Robin stood more upright and faced Validar again. "G...Grima can't take those feelings away from me!"

"This is a sorry display before our master's presence, my son..." The Plegian king made a purpose to emphasize his last two words. "It's time for you to bow before the Fell Dragon's might!" He stopped his attack against Chrom momentarily and instead directed a burst of dark energy directly at Robin, striking him directly in the chest and knocking him to the ground. "There's no damage that I can do to your body that the Fell Dragon cannot repair! Soon you'll find that fear is the most powerful of all human emotions, my son, and the fear of pain and harm reign supreme!" With his last utterance, Validar released another bolt of energy from his palm that slammed into Robin again, pushing his crippled form down to the ground.

Morgan cried out in sheer agony, collapsing to her knees. "He's k...killing him, Mother!" she wailed. "He's killing him!"

"You monster!" Lucina screamed, pounding her fists against the barrier in rage. "You foul, low-life, cowardly, filthy monster!"

Validar glared at her with wild eyes and a fiendish grin. "Oh? Does that bother you? Would you mind if I did it again?" A third time he struck Robin with the attack, making him roll over in pain. Morgan wailed in horror, and covered her face with her hands. "I wouldn't worry about him too much if I were you. He probably didn't feel a thing after the first two. As long as he just barely clings to life, Grima can still awaken inside him!"

"No!" Lucina cried again in fury, tears rolling down her cheeks. She had Falchion in her hands now, slashing away at the wall of energy in front of her in desperation. "How could you?!" Her voice then softened as she addressed the other man lying on the ground. "Robin! Please get up!" she begged. "Please!"

"Get up, Robin," Validar growled. On the command Robin gradually staggered upright, stumbling and falling over the first time he attempted to do so before managing to lift himself off the ground. The front of his undershirt had a gaping hole burned through its center, exposing his raw skin from where Validar had struck him. Robin stood slumped over, entire body twitching with the dark magic. "Now come!" He recovered his tome and took a step forwards toward the Plegian king, bringing his boot down hard on the floor. Then he took another after a brief pause, and slowly he began to make his way towards the altar. He was trapped under Validar's spell, and just like she had been before, Lucina couldn't do

anything to intervene.

"Yes, my son..." Validar grinned victoriously. "Come to me and accept Grima!"

"Robin! Please fight it!" Lucina cried. She was attempting to puncture the barrier that stood between them using Falchion with little success, but she refused to give up. "This isn't who you are!"

"This is all he's ever been!" Validar taunted. "And all he ever will be!"

"That's not true, Robin! You're more than that! I know who you are!" The final words that Robin had written in his journal flooded back to her. "You're the kind of person who puts the needs of others before your own! You're the kind of person who you can ask for help and you'll always give it, even if you have to go out of your way! You're the kind of person who stays up all night working on battle strategies until you can find a way where everybody gets through safe! That's the kind of person you are!"

"Robin, come h-

"You're the only person I know who's crazy enough to lead an entire army inside the crater of a volcano and brilliant enough to come out with little more than a few singed hairs!" Lucina interrupted. "You even managed to make a woman like me fall madly in love with you!"

Robin's walk slowed, and for a moment it seemed like he could overcome the trance he was under before Validar tightened control. "Enough!" he shouted angrily. "Grimleal! Destroy the Ylissean girl!"

Lucina turned away from Robin to find a few Plegian soldiers rapidly approaching her, mindlessly following their king's orders. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Robin's steps return to their original pace. She couldn't afford the distraction, but she needed to protect Morgan as well. Just as she assumed her battle stance, two white pegasi swooped down in front of her, halting the enemy advance.

"We'll protect you, Lucy!" Cynthia shouted, stabbing her lance through a Plegian's torso.

"Help Robin, Lucina!" Sumia turned her head over her shoulder. "You're the only one who can snap him out of it!"

"R...Right!" Lucina nodded graciously, diverting her attention towards Robin once again. "You need to believe me! There are so many people who believe in you! You have a daughter, Robin! You have an amazing, loving daughter who loves you so much and asked me every single day when you would come back!"

"P...Please, Father!" Morgan struggled to stand, weakly bashing her hands against the barrier. "I m...missed you so much! All my life I've wanted to become just like you! I'm training to be a tactician, and you taught me everything I know! P...Please don't go away! I still have so much that I want to do with you, Dad!"

Robin slowed again, hunching over more in strain.

Validar growled in annoyance. "Hgh... Maybe you just need a little more motivation!" He raised his hand into the air, beginning to summon another burst of magic.

Just as he was about to attack, Chrom suddenly charged him, having recovered from the previous battle. "Hyah!" Brandishing Falchion menacingly, he leapt forward and slashed with an angled strike to Validar's side just before the other man was able to teleport away.

Validar reappeared a few yards away, clutching his wound and moaning in pain. "You!" he hissed in fury. The man placed one of his gnarled hands over the gash and showing Chrom his bloodied hand. "Do you know what you've done? You've spilt Fell Blood over Grima's most sacred altar... For this... you must pay with your own!"

"I'd be perfectly content with letting a little more of your sacred blood spill all over this foul place!" Chrom growled, holding Falchion ready for another attack. "I'll send a message to Grima and tell him that his most fanatical servant has failed!"

Validar let out a wrathful roar and unleashed a barrage of dark magic against Chrom, who deflected the attack and began to charge him again. As the two became locked in a stalemate, Validar's control on Robin began to weaken as he diverted more energy to fighting Chrom, giving Lucina the opportunity she needed.

"Robin, all of the Shepherds believe in you! No matter how crazy your plans are, no matter how impossible your ideas may seem, the Shepherds have followed you every time and put their faith in you because they trust you! They know that no matter what you do, you'll always have their safety as your top priority, and you've proven yourself countless times to them that you'll pull through!"

"Feel Grima's power, Son!" Validar commanded. "His abilities are limitless! With them you can have anything you desire! You are to be a king! A GOD! The future has already been written! You cannot change your fate!"

"Don't... listen to him, Robin! Help me... fight him!" Chrom grunted, breathing heavily as he devoted his strength to holding off Validar's attack.

Robin pressed forward, apparently unfazed by either one of their comments, and he continued walking directly towards Chrom and Validar as they struggled against each other. Gradually a short bolt of lightning began to form in his right hand, growing to the length of a dagger, and he held the weapon loosely at his side as he grew nearer and nearer.

"And I believe in you, Robin!" Lucina pleaded, sensing that something was about to happen. "Because I trust you! And I know that we can get through this!" Morgan suddenly grabbed her arm, clutching to it tightly and pressing her face against Lucina's shoulder. "We *can* change fate! Look at Morgan! She's our daughter, Robin! *Our* daughter! She's proof that we can alter the future to something much greater, and there's nothing more that I'd rather want than to change our lives together, but I can't do it without you! Please!"

"D...Dad..." Morgan gasped. "L...Listen to Mom!"

Robin had reached the two other men, and slowly he held up his dagger of lightning over his head, poised to stab one of them.

"Grima will take our future away from us, Robin!" Lucina screamed. "What do *you* choose?"

Robin hesitated.

Chrom swung Falchion to the side, throwing Validar's magic off with great effort, and turned to face his friend. "Robin?" The moment their eyes met, Robin suddenly brought the hissing lightning bolt down through the air. Lucina could only watch in horror as the weapon was buried deep into her father's lower torso, causing him to convulse with shock. His eyes went wide as his hands shot to his chest, clutching the magic weapon in pain. Chrom stumbled backwards and stared up at Robin, who did little more than return his gaze with blank eyes.

"R...Robin..." Chrom choked out the word, sweat beading up on his forehead as he struggled to find breath. "Y...You were... like a little brother to me... Ever since... I found you... And brothers... are supposed to protect each other..." He collapsed to his knees, unable to stand anymore. "I knew... from that day on... that we would share... a friendship... that wouldn't easily be broken... I... I..." His breathing suddenly became much more rapid as he gasped for air, but he forced the sentence from his lips. "I'm sorry... I couldn't... protect you... from him..." With his last words, he slumped forward in a heap onto the ground, not moving.

"N...No... No!" Lucina cried. "Father! No!"

"Father!" Cynthia turned around in shock, face devoid of the smile it always possessed. "Get up, Dad!" she pleaded. "T...The heroes always win! Not the other way around! T...That's how it's s...supposed to be, isn't it Mother?" She desperately looked towards Sumia for support. "Tell me he'll get back up, M...Mother!"

Sumia didn't respond, and she only dropped her weapon to the floor and stared at her husband's fallen body in disbelief.

"Heheheh... Gwahahaha!" Validar erupted into maniacal laughter. "It is finished, Ylisseans! Your leader is dead, and I have the power of the Fire Emblem in my hands alone! Robin has accepted Grima as his master!"

"Robin..." Lucina choked, fresh tears rolling down her cheeks. "W...We were supposed to change this... I t...thought that we c...could..."

"Now my son," Validar stepped over Chrom's body and stood by Robin. "Let's watch the rest of the Ylisseans die, shall we? Grimleal! Finish these infidels off! The day has been won!"

All of the Plegian soldiers turned at once to face Robin, and collectively they murmured in a hollow voice "Hail Grima!" before reassuming the offensive. The Shepherds were still in utter shock, and the Plegians swiftly pushed them back into a condensed group in the center of the room to trap them on all sides. One however began to charge Sumia, who had her back turned and wasn't able to move, eyes still fixated on Chrom. Lucina noticed the attacker too late, and before she could open her mouth to scream, the Grimleal had his axe raised in mid-strike. Lucina couldn't breathe. She couldn't lose both of her parents again, but she couldn't make it to her mother in time. Just as the soldier was about to bring down his weapon, an arrow impaled itself into his back and he collapsed forward.

"Excellent shot!" a woman's voice applauded.

"I still got that sharp aim of mine! Har!"

"W...What?" Lucina stammered, trying to decide whether it was the arrow or the person who shot it that surprised her more. "T...That voice..."

"If there's one thing a Feroxi can't stand, it's not being invited to a good fight!" the voice boomed. Suddenly, a horde of formidable-looking warriors poured out of the entrance corridor and began to attack the Grimleal on sight, rescuing the Shepherds from defeat.

"I sure hope you all didn't forget about us!" Flavia laughed and walked forward.

"Khan Basilio!" Lucina's mouth dropped open. "...It's you!"

"The one and only!" Basilio pounded his bare chest. "Miss me?"

"B...But that's impossible! You... you died!"

"Correction: almost died," the Feroxi man grinned. "The West Khan of Ferox couldn't die when he still had a battle to be won! The warrior blood in me wouldn't allow it! ...Also, this woman would whip my arse for an eternity and a half as soon as she found me in whatever place we all end up in when we become worm food."

"I'm not done with you yet, oaf," Flavia warned, brandishing her sword in the air. "As soon as we're finished here, you can be sure you'll get quite the earful from me!"

"What?" Basilio winced. "You already yelled at me for three hours, woman! Three hours and seven minutes! I timed you and everything."

"Basilio, we all thought that you were killed by Walhart himself! How did you-"

"You want to know how this old dog scraped by? I did it thanks to your advice, Lucina. If you hadn't warned *this* me about how future me met his maker, I wouldn't be here right now," Basilio explained. "I'll spare you the drama and skip right to the chase. I knew that Walhart was a monster the moment I saw him in person. He could probably fight a full-grown wyvern with one hand tied behind his back and win. What do you think, Flavia?"

"Maybe both hands tied," Flavia suggested.

"Har har!" the man guffawed. "As much as I hate to admit it, I stood about the first snowflake of the Feroxi winter's chance in hell of coming out victorious if I engaged him in combat. Ordinarily I would have stood my ground until he drove me *into* it, but I decided to take your warning to heart and go against every ounce of my being."

"I still don't understand..." Lucina frowned.

"Before the Conqueror could take me out for good, I dropped down and pretended he had already landed the fatal blow! My ancestors were all probably rolling around in their graves so badly that they got up and joined the Risen right then and there, but it saved my life, thanks to you Lucina. And so here I am!"

"Hmph!" Validar grunted. "If you think that this changes anything, I'm afraid you're gravely mistaken! If you didn't die in Valm, then you shall die here with the rest of these Ylisseean fools! I still have the Fire Emblem, and I can use it to awaken Grima this very instant!" He removed the artifact from its niche in the wall and held it facing Robin. "Lord Grima!" he cried. "Your appointed time has come! Now accept my son as your one true vessel and return to this world so that you may shape it in your own image!"

Basilio stared at the man blankly for a second before bursting out into laughter. "Hah ha ha! Is *that* how you summon the Fell Dragon? You seemed to be pretty confident in those lines of yours! Tell me, have you practiced this before when no one's around? Just to make sure you get it right when the time comes?"

"W...What?" The smirk dropped off of Validar's face, and he turned the unresponsive Fire Emblem around. "Why isn't it working? It should be working! Everything has gone according to plan!"

"Oh? Don't tell me that Robin forgot to tell you that those Gemstones are fake! What a shame that would be," Basilio grinned. "You *still* haven't realized that you've had the wool pulled over your eyes this whole time, haven't you?"

"These Gemstones are real, you fool! They're the same ones that were in the Fire Emblem when Robin stole it for me!" Validar insisted.

"The only real one is the one you had. I honestly thought you would be a little more clever than *that*! Obviously Robin didn't get his intelligence from you," Basilio shrugged. "He knew that Chrom couldn't bring the real Gemstones to Plegia, so he drafted up this plan ages ago! I met up with the two of them in secret before they even left Valm, and I've been trailing you sprogs for weeks ever since. I switched out the real Gemstones for fake ones before anyone else even noticed!"

"No!" Validar growled in rage. "That still doesn't matter! None of this matters! Chrom is dead, and no matter what he may have done before, Robin is under my control now!"

"Oh, right! Speaking of other people faking a death, you can drop the act now, Chrom!" Basilio called.

"D...Drop the act?" Lucina asked in confusion.

"I couldn't have staged that more perfectly myself!" Basilio laughed. "You even had me fooled for a minute!"

"I...Is that so?" Chrom slowly got up, hoisting himself to a standing position. "Maybe I should consider acting as a side profession after exalt."

"Wha- No!"

"F...Father! Father, you're alive!" Lucina pressed her hands against the barrier in joy. "You're not dead!"

"Yay Father!" Cynthia beamed. "Good always triumphs! I knew it!"

Sumia only could manage a heavy sigh of relief, finally able to move again.

"Robin!" Validar hissed. "Kill him! Unleash the powers of Grima that you already possess and kill them all!"

"G...Grima..." Robin spoke in a monotone voice, body still shuddering.

"Yes... Yes, my son! Embrace Grima!"

"Grima..." Robin repeated. "Will not... control me... anymore!" Immediately he whipped around with hand outstretched, firing a stream of Thoron from his open palm and piercing Validar directly in the chest. The moment the bolt struck its target, the energy barrier that surrounded the altar fractured, and then shattered to pieces like shards of broken glass.

"Gyah!" Validar cried, collapsing to his hands and knees. "How could you... This wasn't supposed... to happen! You were meant... to be... a god!"

"...Not your god," Robin spoke through clenched teeth. "Not today. Not ever!" He fired another bolt of magic at the Plegian king's crippled form, striking him down.

"Damn you..." Validar gasped, body already fading away into purple smoke. "Damn you all..."

Robin stood over the man's vanishing body until it had completely disappeared, and then bent down to retrieve the Fire Emblem that Validar had dropped. "I think... this... belongs... to you... Chrom..." he huffed, handing the artifact to the other man.

"Thank you, Robin," Chrom accepted the offer graciously, rubbing his injured lower torso.

"I...I didn't hurt you too badly, did I?"

"No, it isn't... too bad," Chrom reassured. "I appreciate you weakening your magic though. I can only imagine how much pain I would be in if you didn't."

"S...Sorry for that..."

"All is forgiven, Robin. I just wish I could have seen Validar's face when he-"

"Father!" Lucina sprinted up behind him and gave him a tight hug, smile shining on her face. "You're alive!"

"I'm not ready to go just yet," Chrom replied, holding his daughter close.

"Chrom!"

"Father!"

Sumia and Cynthia were not far behind, running on foot without their pegasi to reach Chrom. Not surprisingly, Cynthia's boot got caught on some miniscule chip of tile and she stumbled, bumping into Sumia and sending her mother crashing to the floor. Both fell in a heap on top of each other.

"Sorry, Mother..."

"That's quite alright, love..."

Chrom and Lucina broke their embrace and hurried over them, each taking an arm and pulling them up.

"Are you two, okay? Did you break anything?"

"We're fine," Sumia reassured, dusting herself off from the fall.

"Honestly, Cynthia," Chrom sighed with a smile. "What did you trip on this time?"

"I...I don't know! I guess I was just so excited to give you an extra big hug that I forgot to look where I was going!" the girl grinned.

Chrom laughed and shook his head, wrapping his family up in his arms.

Robin remained where he was, eying them with a weak smile on his face. He was slightly teetering from side to side as if he was about to fall to the ground as well. He took another look at Lucina laughing with her family, he then stared down at his own hands in disgust. His right was still warm from holding the lightning bolt, and he tried to shake out every trace of it before letting his arm fall limply to his side.

"Dad?" Morgan slowly walked up to him with a downcast expression and cautiously took the hand he had dropped. "Are you okay?" she asked softly, looking up at him with watery eyes.

Robin met her gaze and tried to give her a reassuring smile. "I'm okay..."

"Are you sure?" Morgan asked again, voice quivering. "T...That really hurt you..."

"What do you mean?"

"I...I don't know how, but can just feel what you feel sometimes. When you get your headaches. I see... how much they hurt you..."

"Y...You can?" Robin looked guilty at Morgan's words, and he crouched down slightly so he was at eye level with her.

"That's all my fault that you have to see that, isn't it? I'm so sorry..."

"N...No! It isn't your fault, Father!" Morgan hurriedly stopped him. "I just... I just wanted to make sure... for myself... that were okay..." She sniffed loudly and rubbed her eyes with her free hand. "Because I thought... I thought..."

Robin gently eased the girl into soft embrace, and she wept into his shoulder.

"I thought you were going to d...die, Father! You... You were in so much pain that I thought you were going to die!" she whimpered. "A...And for a second, I c...couldn't feel you there at all! You were almost gone! I don't want you to leave me again, Father!"

"I'm okay now... I won't leave..." Robin soothed, rubbing the back of her head.

"Never leave," Morgan commanded. "Never ever."

"I won't, Morgan." Robin took hold of his daughter's arms and held her in front of him. "Feel better now?"

The girl wiped her nose with the back of her hand as Robin stood her up. "Y...Yeah... J...Just one more hug."

"Do you mind if I join you two?" Lucina asked with a small smile. She didn't know if she would be intruding on the brief moment of father-daughter time that Morgan had craved for so long.

"Only if you like hugs, Mother!"

"I think I can take up that offer," Lucina replied as she sank into Robin's arms. Robin however suddenly winced in pain and pulled back from both of them. "W...What's wrong?" She was immediately on high alert. "What happened?"

"Sorry..." Robin apologized. "You just scraped up against..." He gestured at his enflamed wound, which had immediately turned bright red where Lucina had accidentally touched it. "This..."

"Oh gods, Robin! I almost forgot!" Lucina bent down to assess his raw skin, holding her hand a few inches away from his chest. "Does it hurt a lot?"

"Pretty much..."

"I'll go get Lissa right now! She'll fix you right back up," Lucina told him, standing up and grabbing Robin's arm before she left, looking him deep in the eyes. "You did it, Robin. You fought him and you won!" She couldn't help herself and started to laugh again softly. "We did it! It's over! We won't have to worry about Grima waking up in our lifetime ever again!"

"How very touching..." A deep voice echoed throughout the large room. "But I'm afraid I'm going to have to refute your last statement."

Robin's eyes widened with fear at the very sound. Immediately he seized Lucina's arm in one hand and Morgan's in the other, pulling them behind him for protection.

In the center of the room, flakes of shadowy dust began to appear and congregate together, gradually forming an unstable, humanoid shape. There was a burst of purple light accompanied by a loud ringing noise, and the particles fell away to reveal a hooded man standing before them. As the sound of the explosion died down, he reached up to lower his cowl. Underneath, Robin's face stared back at them.

Lucina had to take another look at him to make sure that she wasn't just seeing things. The man looked exactly like Robin in every way except for his eyes, with the auburn brown being replaced by pale red.

The imposter slowly took a few unsteady steps forward. He seemed to be unable to lift his right foot off the ground and it only dragged behind him, causing a distinct limp in his walk. As he hobbled forward, the other Robin grinned and held his arms outstretched. "It's been such a long time since I saw you last..." he hissed. "Does my appearance trouble you, Lucina? Do I remind you of someone you know?"

"W...Who are you?"

"Oh? Surely you haven't forgotten me," the man replied, halting his advance. "Perhaps this may bring back your nightmares..." His body went rigid and his eyes began to gleam in a bright crimson as his voice immediately altered, becoming much louder and raspy. "Your mother and father... are dead, tiny one... and now it is your turn... to die!"

"Y...You... You're..." The memory rose out of the deepest place in Lucina's mind where she had buried it years ago and was now running rampant throughout her thoughts. It wasn't possible. "Grima..."

Grima's eyes died down in intensity and his voice returned to the one that he had been using earlier. "Ha ha ha... Yes... I am the Fell Dragon you all fought so desperately to stop..."

"W...Why do you look like me?" Robin asked through clenched teeth.

"It's simple. I *am* you, and you are me," Grima smirked. "I am merely you from another future, one of the many in which you cooperate and kill Chrom here."

"How are you here?" Chrom growled. "We stopped you here in this world! Validar never completed your Awakening ritual!"

"You can blame your friend Marth if you'd like. How very ironic that she's the one who tried to stop me but in actually just forced me to come here. I knew that if Lucina managed to change history, my very existence here could cease to be, so when she decided to go back in time, I came with her," Grima explained, directing his next words towards her so he was sure that Lucina could hear. "Every action she took, every decision she changed... I made sure to step in from time to time so I could subtly set the future back on course."

"Everything I've done..."

"Let's go back a few weeks ago, shall we?" Grima continued. "To the night when Lucina attempted to murder my mortal vessel... Have you ever wondered why it was how you received a blistering headache before you could act?" He turned to Robin, cocking his head to his right. "If my vessel of this world was destroyed, it would take quite a long time for me to find another worthy of my gift, so I intervened and attacked her through your body."

"But you didn't change my decision! I had already made up my mind that I wouldn't be able to kill him!" Lucina protested. "Because of your action, you made Robin feel like he had to run away!"

"To my great advantage I may add," Grima chuckled. "Robin was very distraught over what you tried to do to him. In fact, he was so worried that he lost sleep for many consecutive nights. I should really be appreciative of you assisting me so, Lucina. It made his mind weak. Susceptible to... influence..." He hissed out the last word as to taunt her. "No matter how much he tried to stay away, I still led him to this place, just as fate predicted."

Lucina felt Robin's grip tighten on her arm. "All of my headaches... and the voice in my head... was you? I thought they were my father's doing..."

Grima frowned, head still slumped over to one side. "Validar liked to believe that he was the one who had control over you, but was I who lent him that power! It has always been me who has had your mind in my clutches, ever since the day I entered the past! Would you like to know how your memories disappeared?"

"Y...You know what happened to them?"

"Of course, because your amnesia was my doing as well. During my initial attempt to establish the link that we share, you were too weak and were unable to sustain it for extended periods of time, forcing me to break it before I could try again. However in the process of breaking this connection, part of your mind was permanently damaged, which made you lose all recollection of your past life."

"Is that what you tried to do to me too?" Morgan asked angrily, stepping forward from behind Robin. "Are you why I don't have any memories of Mother?"

Grima stared at the girl intensely, menacing smile creeping its way across his face. "Well, well, well... So this *is* the time period where you ended up! Your location has been lost to me for quite some time, Morgan."

"H...How do you know my name?"

"Why, I couldn't forget the name of my own daughter!"

"W...What!?" Morgan stammered, unable to comprehend what he had said. "You're not my father! My father is right here with me!"

"Come now, Morgan," Grima sighed. "You know that man isn't your real father. You're but a few years apart in age, and he didn't raise you. He didn't even know that you existed until today."

"But... But he's still my father!"

"Leave her alone, Grima," Robin growled, taking a step forward.

The Fell Dragon continued, ignoring Robin's warning. "I was the one who raised you, ever since you were a small child. I've been searching for you for a long time, Morgan, ever since you were taken from me." He offered out his right hand. "Come, my child! Stand by my side again!"

"No..." Morgan held her head in her hands and shook it. "No! Stop telling me lies! I won't listen!"

"I said, leave her alone!" Robin shouted angrily, letting go of Lucina's arm to pull his Thoron tome out of his coat.

Lucina already had Falchion drawn once again, ready to attack immediately if Grima tried anything against her daughter.

"Do you want the truth? Do you think that the truth will heal you, girl?"

"What was my life like before I lost my memories?" Morgan asked desperately. "Tell me!"

"Is that what you desire? Very well." Grima rose up to full height. "In the future, you were my *most* faithful servant, and you stood by my side with absolute loyalty!"

"I...I would never do that!"

"But you did indeed," the Fell Dragon smirked. "And you served me one, very special purpose, Morgan. You were given the sole task of *destroying* the Shepherds. One. By. One." He paused for a moment to revel in the girl's horrified face before continuing. "You hunted them down relentlessly and gave them no pity as you watched their puny lives drain from their eyes."

"Liar!" Lucina shouted, face flush with anger. "She would never do something like that! Do you expect us to believe that she's a murderer?"

"You can choose whether or not you believe it for yourselves. It makes no difference to me, because soon... Very soon, it won't matter what you think!" Grima laughed. His slumped head rolled forward, and he had to physically push it back upright with his hands. "As I'm sure you've recognized, this body is awfully weak from time travel. Humans are such fragile, little things. All it takes is one little incident to break one. It's a shame really. Even my chosen vessel has degraded over the years." He shrugged as if it was a minor annoyance at most. "I can just replace this one with another though."

"That's all you think about Robin?" Lucina growled. "You even need him and yet you treat him like he's no more than some sort of... some sort of puppet that you can just throw away like garbage?"

"Funny... I thought that was exactly what he was," Grima replied. "He was born to serve one purpose: to be my mortal vessel in this world. Nothing more. If a tool, like a sword let's say, breaks, what do you do with it?" he asked, not expecting Lucina to respond. "Do you keep it around and still try to fight with it even though it's broken? Of course not. You throw it away and find a new one, and that analogy is no different with Robin. He's nothing but a tool in the grand scheme of things."

Lucina raised Falchion above her head, fully prepared to charge the Fell Dragon in rage. "You'll eat those words!" she screamed. "I'll show you how easily *you* can be disposed of!"

"Lucina, don't!" Robin begged weakly, grabbing the back of her tunic. "He'll kill you!"

"I may not. Immediately..." Grima grinned. "There's something I would like her to see first before she dies a terrible, most painful death. She'll get to watch you break before her very eyes!" His eyes gleamed a bright red like they had before, and all it took was a glance from him before Robin winced and doubled over slightly in agony. "Ha ha ha... Look at him, girl! Look at all this pain you're forcing him to endure! You could end his suffering by just turning him over to me though. Let him join my side, and his anguish will be halted forever! Isn't that what you want? All you have to do is leave!"

"I won't. Leave him. Again," Lucina responded, clutching Robin's right hand tightly. "I'm staying right here."

"So am I! No matter who you say I am! B...Because... You're lying!" Morgan shouted, copying Lucina and taking hold of her father's other hand. She was feeling some of the effects of the headaches as well, but she didn't show any signs of succumbing to them.

"We have his back." Chrom walked up behind Robin and put a hand on his shoulder. "Isn't that right, Robin?"

"R...Right..." Robin grunted through clenched teeth. "I b...belong here with the Shepherds, not with you." He gradually stood back up and put a determined expression on his face. "And I already told you... You won't control me anymore!"

Grima's smile turned into an expression of frustration as he continued to try and take over Robin's mind with no result. "You resist even the presence of your god..." he hissed. His eyes returned to normal and he apparently stopped trying, judging from how Robin's tense muscles gradually relaxed. "The Dragon's Table is set with a sacrifice that must be claimed, and if you refuse... then I must claim it in your stead!"

"What?!"

"Maybe I can remain in this body for a little while longer!" Grima cried, holding his arms out to his sides. "Though I may be weak now, the life force of thousands of my servants will allow me to reclaim my original strength!" His body began to emanate an aura of black smoke, identical to the kind that was contained inside the bodies of the Risen. Grima was then struck by a continuous stream of dark lightning from his statue above the altar, and he started laughing maniacally. "The power that exists here at my Dragon's Table... will allow me to assume my true form!" He suddenly disappeared in a burst of light, and the entire structure began to quake with energy.

"We need to leave!" Robin commanded, urging Lucina and Morgan to run in front of him. "Now!"

"You heard him! Get moving!" Chrom shouted, tucking the Fire Emblem underneath his arm while hurrying towards the front of the army to provide some sort of leadership.

There was a panic amongst the army as they all began rushing the door from which they had come in. The hallway however was far too narrow to allow for large groups, thus the entrance became more and more crowded as all of the Shepherds hurried to leave. The Dragon's Table shuck violently, and purple light began to pour out of the cracks in the stone.

Lucina made sure to keep a firm hand on Morgan's arm so she wouldn't lose her in the confusion, and Robin guided them both from behind with a hand on each of their shoulders. Running down the corridor was difficult given the sheer number of people pouring through it, and it was only when they all made it outside that the Shepherds were able to spread out and give each other more room. Just as the last few people trickled out, the entire structure itself emitted a blinding beam of light from its spire, piercing the very center of the clouds that had conjured above it. Even through the storm, Lucina could see the energy rapidly expanding until the beam halted entirely.

From the clouds, a shadowy black shape formed and six, blazing red eyes peered down on them from the darkness like a predator stalking its prey. Its head pushed its way into view, slightly agape jaws displaying a mouthful of jagged teeth. The creature slowly raised its head high into the air so that it stared up into the sky, and the plates that ran down its armored neck began to beat intensely in a wave-like pattern. Unfurling its massive, feathery wings, Grima's dragon form let out an ear-piercing cry at the heavens that seemed to rattle the entire world below to its core.

"Oh gods... That's..."

"That's G...Grima! The m...monster who terrorized my world," Lucina stammered, sweat building up on her forehead. "I tried everything I could to prevent him from rising again, but n...now it's too late! Just for one second I thought we had succeeded... but now he's among us!"

Robin stared up at the monstrous dragon lingering above the altar for a long time, then turned to her angrily. "No! It isn't over yet! I'm not going to give up! We must still have a chance!"

"But it's as big as a mountain..." Frederick winced. "Bigger! It could probably swallow half this army in one bite with jaws that size! How does a man fight a mountain?"

Before anyone could respond, Grima let out another bone-chilling screech, and then began to pulse with a red aura which flowed down its body as if it was his very blood. Another cry was heard, not from Grima but from the hundreds of Plegians in the distance who surrounded the Dragon's Table. They began to fall over at random intervals until the entire group was lying on the ground, all unmoving. The aura through Grima's body faded, and he roared again with great triumph.

"H...He just stole the life f...from all those people!" Morgan cried. "All at once!"

"T...They're all dead!?" Chrom asked in horror.

"Physically dead, no... Not yet..." Robin answered gravely. "But Grima stole their souls. Everything that made them individuals, and what made life worth living. They're nothing more than husks now, still technically alive but decaying from the inside out..."

"All those people..." Chrom scanned the horizon at the fallen. "There were thousands... Thousands we couldn't save..."

"We need to do something soon, Father! There will be millions more who'll fall to him if we don't!"

Suddenly Grima began to take powerful flaps of his wings. He slowly climbed higher and higher into the sky, and the first few wing beats were close enough to blast the surrounding earth with forceful gusts of wind. The air kicked up large clouds of sand and dust that blew outwards from around the Dragon's Table in all directions.

"Get down!" Chrom screamed over the gale. "Get down!"

Lucina immediately pulled the cowl of Morgan's coat up and over her face to protect her eyes. Before she could react further, Robin had pulled off his coat and threw it over both her and the girl, wrapping them up to shield them then pulling them to the ground just as the sandstorm raged overhead. It only lasted for a minute, but Lucina could feel the force of the sand particles like thousands of tiny arrows even from beneath the coat. Once the danger had blown past, Robin gradually got up from on top of them, gently pulling his coat off as they stood up as well. His arms were red and stinging from using them to shield his face, and his windswept hair looked even more untidy from before, but otherwise he didn't seem to be too badly hurt.

Lucina released Morgan from her grasp and reached up to wipe his face. "Why is it that every time I'm in danger of something you have to throw yourself on top of me and take the punishment?" she scolded, next brushing her fingers through his sandy hair in a futile attempt to help clean it. "Not that I don't appreciate it, but you keep getting yourself hurt!"

"I don't know..." Robin shrugged and gave a small smile. "I guess I can't help it."

"Where is he going?" Chrom asked, watching the Fell Dragon's massive body recede behind the clouds.

"In my future, he needed time to readjust to his dragon form." Lucina reasoned, turning to face her father. "It took him several days before he was able to regain his true power and begin to lay waste to the world."

"Then we need to do something to stop him immediately! Otherwise we won't stand a chance against him," Robin declared. "Chrom! Do you still have the Fire Emblem?"

"Of course!" Chrom held up the artifact so Robin could see.

"Then we need to perform the Awakening! If we can call upon Naga's power now, it may be the only way that we can stop Grima! Do you know how to use it?"

"Yes, I was instructed at a very young age regarding how to call upon the Divine Dragon only under the most dire circumstances, but it has to be done in a sacred altar to her," Chrom explained.

"If my memory serves me correctly, the first exalt performed the Awakening at the peak of Mount Prism. There should be a shrine devoted to Naga there," Frederick suggested. "It would be the best place to try."

"I agree. Mount Prism was one of our last remaining strongholds in the future," Lucina added. "Grima's power was weakened there, so we were able to hold off his Risen invaders for longer periods of time."

"Then we leave at once! Shepherds, we make for Mount Prism!"

At Chrom's command, the scattered army slowly began to pick themselves up, exhausted but not yet beaten. Uniting once more behind their leader, they gathered whatever was left of their camp that hadn't blown away and left the desert and the Dragon's Table behind, hope still unbroken in each of their hearts.

The chapter of chapters! Lucina's trust in Robin helped him pull through and overcome Grima's will, despite whatever "fate" had in store for them! Remember in the Plegia Castle chapter how Robin flinched when he heard Lucina call to him, and I said in my author's note to keep that in mind? This is the part that I was preparing you all for! By telling him everything that she truly believes, Lucina wins over Robin's mind from Validar's clutches. Even though he and Chrom had a plan, Robin still could have fallen to Grima if Lucina hadn't intervened, as Robin didn't expect Validar's magical assault to have such a crippling effect on him. Then we get a brief flash of golden family moments, especially between Robin and his daughter before Grima himself appears.

I picture Grima in this story to physically act almost as how you would picture a zombie. Over the years, Robin's body that Grima possesses has visibly weakened, and that's why he can't hold his head up straight or lift his foot. Think of Grima trying to manipulate a puppet that's half-broken, and he can't hold all the strings. The fact that Grima recognizes Morgan and calls her by name is rather mysterious, and what he says about her is even more strange. We know that Morgan would never do those awful things that he says, and Grima *is* rather notorious for lying... We'll have to see...

And... we've hit over 100,000 words! I never expected this story to get this long, but you can all be sure that I'll keep writing until we've reached the very end! Don't worry though - we still have a lot more to go!

Chapter 20: The Stars

I return a week late to wish our blue-haired heroine the happiest of belated birthdays! This chapter just so happened to fall around that date, so I decided to make it my contribution to her birthday present! However, I must warn you first: given that this is basically a birthday present to the OTP (because Robin doesn't have a set birthday), it will be fluff, but completely and totally worth it because it's romantic fluff. I have no regrets! Enjoy!

In which the long day takes its toll on the army and Robin and Lucina regain what they lost

Chapter 20 – The Stars

The hour was growing late, and the chaos of the day was gradually giving away to a rather calm evening. It seemed as if the entire camp was exhausted and ready to settle down for the few short hours they had before continuing on their march to Mount Prism. The soldiers stripped off their cocoons of armor as if they were shedding their skin, and then they eagerly sought refuge in their tents. Lucina joined the others in this metamorphosis and removed her shoulder-plates, belt, and cape, but there were two people she needed to see first before she could change into her nightclothes.

Slowly she brushed aside the flap to Morgan's tent and peered inside. It was dark, but the candle near her bedside was smoking faintly; it must have just been put out. Once she had made the safe assumption that the sprawled form lying underneath the pile of blankets on the bed was indeed her daughter, Lucina began to exit as quietly as she could manage.

"Is that you, Mother?" The girl's voice asked softly from the darkness just as Lucina was about to slip out.

"Yes, it's me."

"Did you want to speak with me?"

Lucina pushed the flap of the tent open all the way and took a few steps back inside. "I was just coming in to check on you, but we could talk if you'd like. I thought that you were asleep."

"Almost," Morgan yawned and slightly readjusted her blankets. Lucina couldn't see the girl's facial features in the low light, but she could tell that her head was peeking out at her. "Father just put me to bed."

"Do you know where he went?"

"I'm not sure," the girl replied sleepily. "He couldn't be too far. He just left a minute or two ago. You must have just missed him."

Lucina glanced outside the doorway as if Robin would be right behind her. "Did he look okay when he was here? He didn't talk about running away again, did he?"

"No, nothing like that," Morgan reassured. "He's all clean and he smells nice now if that's what you mean by okay."

"That's good news, but I meant okay mentally. You can feel what he feels, can't you?"

"Only when he gets headaches, but I wish I could at other times though. I couldn't pick out exactly what he sounded like when he was here," the girl admitted. "He seemed okay I suppose. He came in here for a little while, and then he tucked me in and kissed me goodnight before he left. I don't know why, but he seemed little sad to me..."

"Hmm... I'll go look for him and see if I can find out what's wrong." Lucina walked over to the bedside and allowed her eyes to readjust so she could better see the girl's face, and then bent down to give her a kiss on the forehead.

"Goodnight, Morgan." Before she could stand back up, the girl unexpectedly reached up and wrapped her arms around Lucina's shoulders.

"W...Wait, Mother!" she stammered, voice suddenly very distressed. "Y...You are my mother, right? No matter what G...Grima says?"

"Of course I am. Your Brand proves it," Lucina smiled. "Don't let whatever Grima said scare you. You and I both know that it wasn't true."

"Y...Yeah," Morgan replied, sounding calmer but still not entirely sure of herself. "I believe you."

"We'll figure everything out," Lucina told her. "But I think we should all get some sleep for tonight, okay?"

Morgan nodded and gave another light yawn. "Goodnight Mom..."

"Goodnight sweetie. Try to have some nice dreams for me."

"I'll try..."

Lucina straightened the girl's blankets, and then quietly stepped outside as Morgan closed her eyes. She faced the closed tent in thought and let out a restrained sigh just soft enough so that the girl wouldn't be able to hear her from the other side of the canvas wall. She wished that she could tell Morgan with absolute certainty that what the Fell Dragon had told her was a lie, but in truth she wasn't able to prove anything. She hadn't even known that Morgan existed until a few weeks ago, and Morgan didn't have any memories of her. Dozens of new questions sprouted up in her mind regarding her daughter's origins. The girl *did* have the Brand and her exact hair color as well as her fighting style and the ability to wield Falchion, but was it possible that those were all just coincidences? Could the Brand have been put in the girl's eye by some other means besides heritage? Had Falchion itself been tricked when it gave Morgan its power? Was it possible that Morgan didn't remember anything about her because she never had those memories in the first place?

Lucina couldn't say anything for sure anymore except the fact that Grima knew something that she didn't about Morgan's past, even if what he had said at the Dragon's Table was fabricated. As soon as they performed the Awakening at Mount Prism and faced the Fell Dragon again, she would force the truth out of him no matter what it took before she cut him down.

Those would have to be the objectives of tomorrow's endeavor though. She had more pressing concerns to address this evening, most of which involved where the girl's father had ran off to. Morgan said he had just left a few minutes ago, so he must have either gone back to his tent or decided to wander around camp like he did every so often. His tent would be the easiest place to check, but he didn't answer her when she called for him nor was he inside when she snuck a quick peek through the tent flap to make sure he wasn't asleep already.

She walked a quick perimeter around the camp, but she still wasn't able to find Robin anywhere. It had gotten quite dark in the short amount of time since Lucina had left Morgan's tent; she figured that wherever the man was, she wouldn't be able to find him without the sunlight to assist her. Despondent, she began to walk back her own tent to sleep when she found that the darkness was just what she had needed.

There was the faint, wavering glow of a small campfire that she had missed earlier shining from behind the weapons tent, now visible against the shadows on the canvas. She caught a silhouette sitting down on a crate near it, just barely visible from the path so that he would be passed by anyone who wasn't looking for him. Lucina slowly approached as to not startle him too much, suddenly finding the action to be all too familiar. She had snuck up from behind him as well when she had tried to cut him down, and he was completely oblivious to the heinous act that she was about to commit. She stopped in her tracks, briefly considering leaving him alone entirely so he would have the night to himself and his thoughts, but her own desire to speak with him outweighed that option.

"Robin!" she called out softly, making sure she was far enough away so that he would notice her approach.

The man tore his gaze away from the flames in front of him and glanced over his shoulder. "Hello, Lucina. Nice to see you," he responded, beckoning for her to come closer with a wave of his hand. "What brings you here?"

"I just wanted to see you," Lucina told him almost hesitantly. "I wanted to make sure that you were feeling okay and that you haven't gotten any bad headaches since we left Plegia."

"I feel fine," Robin responded distractedly, gaze drifting to the bare ground. "I haven't had any headaches yet."

"That's good." Lucina smiled, but Robin didn't seem to notice. He wasn't hiding the fact that his thoughts were elsewhere, so she tried to strike up a casual chat to take his mind off whatever was bothering him. "You look all clean. It must feel nice."

"Well, I guess I can say with completely certainty now that I understand how a nice, long bath can really make you feel like a new man." He gestured to himself with both hands. The dirt and grime had been scrubbed off his skin, and his hair was once again its pure white color and was combed down to relative neatness. He was wearing a change of clothes, consisting of only a new undershirt and plain pants; Lucina surmised that his usual outfit was probably being washed. He looked like he had before he left, but his face was sullen and defeated.

"I just checked on Morgan," Lucina attempted again to start a conversation. "She said that you were just there to put her bed." She gave a light laugh at her next thought. "Did she talk to you so much that she collapsed? She's been so excited to see you, you know."

"No... We barely talked at all," Robin replied quietly. "I just went in there to see how she was faring after today. All she wanted me to do was to stay there with her, so I sat down on the bed and she sat next me. She didn't make a sound until she rested her head on her pillow and said 'I'm sorry, Dad' before closing her eyes."

Lucina frowned. That wasn't like Morgan at all. Something was definitely the matter. "May I sit?" she asked.

"...Oh! Of course." Robin didn't seem to hear her at first, but then slid himself over on the crate to make room.

She graciously took the seat, giving the man another moment before asking her next question. "What's really wrong, Robin?"

"Hmm? Nothing's wrong..."

"Robin, you're not fooling anyone with that anymore, least of all me," Lucina told him. "I know something else is on your mind. Something that's troubling you." She paused, waiting for a response that didn't come. She turned to look him in the eyes, but his gaze shifted elsewhere. "Why can't you open up to me?" she asked, beginning to grow desperate. "You've been gone for so long, and I've wanted to speak with you again since the moment I discovered that you left! Do you not want to talk with me? Are you mad?"

"Nothing like that!" Robin hurriedly responded. "I could never be mad at you. I've just been... thinking..."

"About what?"

"About what Validar said," Robin said at last. "It's just that... I know he was insane. I know his motives were twisted and that he had to be stopped, but even so, I suppose I just wished that there was a little good left in him."

"But I thought you said that he wasn't a father to you..."

"And he wasn't," Robin agreed. "A parent-child relationship should be like the one you share with Chrom, or the one Morgan shares with you. It should be built upon foundations of trust, support, and love. Validar didn't meet any of those criteria, but I just can't ignore the fact that he *was* my actual father. Even after everything he had already done," he explained sadly, letting out a sigh before continuing.

"Emmeryn believed that there was good in all people, and she had the spectacular ability to see it. She knew, no matter how barbarous and cruel they may have seemed, the Plegians wanted a war as little as the Ylisseans did, and it took her sacrifice to prove it. I had the same hope for my father. That, maybe, there was a tiny speck of good inside his blackened heart. That when I was born, maybe he did love me before Grima corrupted his mind, and maybe he still held some of that love." He was silent for a while. "I think that out of everyone we've encountered in this world, he was the sole person who Emmeryn was wrong about. He never loved me, not even for a fraction of a second. He said so himself: he knew from the moment I was born that I would be Grima's vessel, and that's all he ever saw me as. I guess you could say that I'm a little jealous of you actually. Your parents are two amazing people who'll do everything in their power to keep you safe, and you have such a caring and optimistic sister. I come from a long line of Fell Dragon worshippers who couldn't value a human life any less..."

"Then you need to be the one who will break that chain! You aren't like them. I know you aren't!" Lucina insisted. "If they couldn't value a human life any less, then you couldn't value a human life any *more*. You're the greatest tactician Ylisse has ever known, Robin, and do you know why?"

The man looked at her strangely, not sure where she was trying to lead the conversation.

"It's not just because your strategies work every time," she explained. "It's because you make sure that no one is going to die on your watch. You'll think and rethink your ideas dozens of times just to make sure that everyone will live to see another day. A human life is everything to you!"

"If any one of the Shepherds died because I was negligent, I don't think I would ever be able to live with myself," Robin added quietly. "They're all very important to me."

"And you're important to them." Lucina paused, trying to determine how she would phrase her next sentence. "I...I don't know what it feels like to have a parent who doesn't care for me, and I *am* truly blessed to have such a wonderful family. But if it makes you feel any better, that family loves you very much. My mother thinks you're the most thoughtful person in Ylisse, Cynthia has recounted numerous times to me all of your heroic deeds on the battlefield, and I don't even have to speak about what my father thinks of you. Then there's me, and I think you're pretty amazing." She smiled at her own understatement, managing to get one out of Robin in return.

"That's all I *should* care about, but it's just hard to ignore the thought that my very own father almost killed me, and

willingly too. He even took... pleasure in bringing me near death..."

"Oh! That's right!" Lucina exclaimed. "I didn't even ask you how your chest was feeling!" She leaned over and lifted the bottom of his shirt up.

Robin's face turned a deep red. "L...Lucina! W...What are you doing?"

"I'm just checking to make sure that the healers did a good job," Lucina replied distractedly, not picking up on Robin's embarrassment. "It looks okay, but it's still all bruised... Does it hurt if I touch it?" she asked as she reached out and brushed her fingertips against his skin.

The man's cheeks darkened in color in response to her touch, and he quickly but gently removed her hand and lowered his shirt. "I...It's fine. All good." He gave a nervous laugh. "D...Dark magic takes longer to heal than other types, b...but I'm okay."

Lucina still didn't understand why he was acting so uncomfortable. "What's the matter? I was just checking to make sure you were feeling better."

"I...I know, and I a...appreciate it, but it's just that you were lifting up my shirt... and you were staring at my chest really intently..." he stuttered.

"So?" Lucina asked innocently, looking back at him with a child's eyes.

"Umm..." Robin correctly assumed that she honestly had no idea how suddenly intimate she had been, so he figured he would get nowhere without making that fact known to her. "It's nothing. I don't why I responded like that..."

Lucina frowned, looking at her own hands. "Do you not like it when I touch you? D...Did Grima make it so that you'll feel pain if I try to touch you? Is that even possible? With me having Exalted Blood..." she reasoned out loud. "Did I just hurt your chest again?! I'm so sorry, Robin!"

"No, that wasn't the case at all!" Robin reassured her. "I was just surprised, that's all. I...It isn't every day that someone suddenly lifts up your shirt." He saw that she still didn't look convinced, so he added, "Really, it's perfectly fine. I appreciate your concern."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Then will you mind if I touch your arm? I want to check something else."

"Go right ahead."

Lucina hesitantly reached out and felt his bare forearm for a moment. "Just as I thought. You're shivering. I thought you were before," she concluded, suddenly noticing for herself how the temperature had declined sharply as soon as the sun set. "It is getting a little chilly out. Are you cold?"

"A little," Robin replied. "You?"

"I guess," she admitted.

"Well, I know a way for the both of us to warm up," he suggested.

"How so?"

"Like this." The man spread his arms out wide and wrapped them tightly around her back, pulling her close into his body and resting his chin lightly atop her head. "Much better," he sighed and closed his eyes. "I'm feeling warmer already. How about you?"

He wasn't able to tell, for he couldn't see her face, but Lucina was smiling wide. This was one of the things that she had missed most dearly. He wasn't anxious or tense like he had been when they embraced earlier. He was like he had been before he left, as strong and confident as when he had professed his love for her, and she couldn't be happier. "I feel like I'm going to melt." She wished she could. Just melt into his arms and forget all the troubles in the world. Even Grima seemed so far away...

"I missed this every minute I was gone." Robin always seemed able to say exactly what she was thinking. "Not just this. Everything about you. Your eyes, your voice, everything. Even the smell of your hair."

"What does my hair smell like?" Lucina laughed.

"I don't know," Robin grinned. "It was just to make a point. I got very... lonely when I was away..."

When he was away... That reminded her...

"Robin," she began to ask. "Do you mind at all if we put this hug on hold for a moment? I have something that I want to give to you."

"You don't need to give me anything," he insisted, not willing to relinquish her so quickly.

"It's important! I'll only be gone for a minute, and then I'll be right back," she promised. "Don't move!"

"O...Okay then. Just be fast," Robin pleaded, releasing her from his grasp.

Lucina was as reluctant to leave as he was, so as soon as she stood up she made sure to stay true to what she had said and sprinted back to her tent as quickly as she could manage. She threw open the chest at the foot of her bed and began digging around inside until she discovered what she was searching for. She then pulled her blanket off the bed and carefully wrapped the object up. Clutching the small bundle with both hands, Lucina burst outside, paused mid-stride as she realized she had forgotten to close the chest, and then ran back into the tent to do so before continuing on her way.

Robin looked terribly relieved to see her return, as if he had been worried that she would leave him. Letting out the breath he had been holding, he eyed her parcel curiously. "What did you bring?"

"I brought us a blanket," Lucina smiled, taking her seat next to him and starting to unwrap the bundle. She kept the other object hidden from view in her lap as she unfurled the blanket and draped it over both of them. Once they each adjusted it so that it covered them completely, Lucina slid over on the crate so that she was pressing up against Robin's arm.

"It's very comfortable," Robin smiled. "But what's so important about it?"

"Oh, the blanket isn't what I wanted to give you," Lucina explained, gradually withdrawing a burnt book from underneath the blanket and handing it to him. "I believe that this is yours."

"W...What?" Robin eyed the book with shock, taking it from her with shaking hands. "T...This... This is my journal..." He slowly opened the cover and flipped through a few of the tattered pages just to make sure that it did indeed belong to him. "H...How in Naga's name did you get this? I thought that it was g...gone for good..."

"My mother found it when she left to go on a search mission for you," Lucina explained. "She gave it to me in the middle of the night, and said that it was a miracle it wasn't completely destroyed."

Robin reached the last few entries, and he slammed the book shut and looked at her nervously. "S...So, you read it?"

"A few times actually. Every word that I could still read."

"I...I'm sorry that you had to see this..." Robin turned the book over several times in his hands. "You must think I'm c...crazy then, don't you? I wouldn't blame you..."

"No! That book... It explained everything! Without it, I would never have known what it was that you were really going through!" Lucina replied. "All those things you said all make sense to me now. This whole time you've been getting headaches that you haven't told me about, and you've been lonely and scared all the time!"

Robin lowered the book into his lap, looking down in shame and saying nothing.

"What you said before we went inside Plegia Castle, about reminding you in case you forgot your promise... That was a silent cry for help, wasn't it? But I didn't understand what you meant, so I couldn't give you it! Not once did you ever ask me or my father or anyone for support outright, even though you desperately needed it!"

"I...It was my problem to face. I didn't want other people to have to be burdened with it, least of all you..." Robin replied, voice very small.

"But Robin!" Lucina cried. "I could have helped you! All you ever had to do was ask! I didn't know what I really meant to you until I read that journal, and in your entry from the day we went into town together, you said that just being around me helped you fight off Grima. Those headaches were torture, Robin! Torture!"

"T...They weren't that bad..."

"Robin, that night when I drove you away, I got one of those headaches. It was just for a few seconds, but it was one of the most painful things I've experienced in a long time. Yours last for longer, and you get them every day! If you had just told me I could have helped! You didn't have to go through all that agony!" Lucina's lip quivered and she was unsure of whether to be sad or angry. "I...I don't like seeing you get hurt!"

The man clutched the book in his hands more tightly and didn't respond.

"Why can't you tell me?" Lucina asked after a moment of silence, seizing his wrist to get his attention. "If this relationship is going to work, we need to tell each other everything, Robin! All of our joys and all of our fears so we can experience them together! I don't want to keep secrets anymore!"

"I didn't tell you... because I...I *did* want this relationship to work," Robin finally replied, looking at her with sad eyes. "It was just like I said before at the Dragon's Table... If I had told you before, then you would have never seen me the same way again."

"But telling me that you get headaches wouldn't change what I thought of you!" she protested.

"Lucina, put yourself in your own shoes," the man commanded. "Before I left, before we went to Plegia, before we defeated Walhart. Think back to your own mindset on the night when I brought you dinner while you were training. Now what would you have honestly done *if* when I brought that tray of food to you, I told you that I felt I had a strong connection to Grima? So strong that he could speak to me through my mind."

"I...I'm not sure what I would have done..."

"Would you have ever wanted to associate yourself with me after the thought had taken root in your mind that I could be potentially dangerous to your father?"

"N...No... Probably not..."

"You would have acted just like you did after I took the Fire Emblem: cold, always alert, keeping your gaze trained on me whenever I was around to make sure I didn't do anything else..."

Lucina winced. "Y...You noticed that? I thought I was being subtle..."

"Lucina, I could practically feel two holes being drilled into the back of my head everywhere I went," Robin told her. "I don't blame you one bit. That's probably what I would have done if I was you and had experienced the same things you did. But even so, I had the worst pang in my chest because it was exactly what I feared would happen once you found out about me." He held up his journal and flipped through a few of the earliest entries to show her. "I don't know how much you picked up on through this book, but I...I've wanted this relationship to work for a long time. Gods, who am I kidding? I've been in love with you ever since that assassin in the courtyard sliced off your mask and I saw your face for the first time. I know it sounds possessive, but I've just wanted to have you all to myself from that moment onward! And when you finally told us who you were and what kind of world you came from, I just wanted to take you up into my arms and tell you that it would be okay and not let anything else happen to you. I could endure anything that Grima tried against me if it meant that you would love me back!" Lucina saw his eyes growing watery. "No matter how painful it was, it would be nothing! Nothing in comparison to the pain I would feel if you hated me!"

"Robin..."

"B...But that's just the problem!" he continued, voice becoming more frantic. "You *should* hate me! You have every reason in the world to hate me! I mean, look at you! You're the princess of Ylisse! You're noble and just and strong and determined! You defied time itself so that you could save the world! Not just your parents, but the whole world! It's a task bigger than life itself and yet I know that you won't let anything stand in your way and you'll get it done because that's just who you are! And who are you trying to save the world from?" he asked, not expecting her to answer. "It's Grima! And do you know who I am? I'm Grima's *vesse*! I *am* Grima! I'm the son of a lunatic who was the son of another lunatic and so on! Children are supposed to be products of love between their parents! I was *bred*! I was bred, Lucina! Like an animal!" The tears he had been holding back began to leak out onto his reddened cheeks. It was the second time she had ever seen him cry. "There was never any love in my life! I was created for Grima to control! And look at him! You saw him in the Dragon's Table! He had my body, so a puppet *was* all that I was destined to become in other futures! I let Grima come back! I took your parents away from you! I ruined what could have been your happy life! I...I..."

Lucina grabbed the back of his head in both of her hands, held him steady until he had stopped speaking, and then eased him into a long-awaited kiss. She kept his face pressed tightly against hers, refusing to let go until he had stopped shaking and returned her embrace. When they did break away, Lucina kept him close and began to run her fingers through his hair. "Shh..." she soothed, keeping her voice down to almost a whisper. "Everything will be fine..."

"B...But I'm still Grima... You should h...hate me..."

"I may hate Grima, but I don't hate you, Robin. You and Grima are not the same! I may have thought that before, but not anymore. And do you know how I know?"

Robin weakly shook his head.

"It's because you're stronger than Grima! You proved to me today that he can't control you anymore! Grima may have returned, but I'm not scared like I thought I would be because I truly believe that we can beat him. You already did, Robin!" she laughed softly. "He couldn't control you no matter how hard he tried because you're more powerful than he is!"

The man was quiet for a while, and simply allowed Lucina to comb through his hair before speaking again. "Is what you said true?" he asked hesitantly. "What you said in the Dragon's Table? About you wanting to change our lives together?"

"I'd want nothing more," Lucina reassured. "As soon as this war is over and Grima is gone, that's what we'll do." She released his head and allowed him to slowly sit upright before she slumped over and rested her head on his shoulder. Her eyes wandered to the dying flames in front of them, and she watched the tiny embers they gave off rise into the clearing sky. "Look at the stars, Robin," she urged. "They're beautiful tonight, don't you agree?"

"They're very nice," the man smiled, wiping his eyes.

"I think they look brighter now than they did in the future," she sighed. "We hardly ever got to see them, but on the few occasions when the clouds did open up, the stars were still there. Nothing had happened to them while they were away. I loved to see them. They were one of the few things that Grima could never take away."

"It's truly amazing to think how big this world really is, and how little we actually know about it," Robin wondered.

"It is," Lucina nodded in thought. "I know it sounds kind of crazy, but the stars hold a very special importance to me."

"How so?"

"I always liked to believe that somewhere up there in the night sky, my parents were looking down on me. Just to make sure that I was okay and to be with me even though I couldn't see them." She smiled sadly. "I wondered sometimes if what I was doing was right, or if life was even worth living anymore. I wish they could have sent me a sign to tell me what they thought. Do you think that they were proud of me? Of everything I tried to do?"

"You could just ask them now," Robin laughed. "But if I was in Chrom's place, I would be the proudest father alive. How's that for an answer?"

"Thank you, Robin. That does make me feel better." Lucina yawned, and her eyelids seemed suddenly very heavy to hold up. "Did you see the same stars, Robin? When you were away I mean." The man nodded in response. "It's nice to know that even if a person is so far away, you still can look up in the sky and see the same thing he sees." She pushed the side of her head deeper into Robin's shoulder and allowed her eyes to close lightly. "What was it like being out on your own? Your journal didn't tell me. I want to know everything."

"Well as soon as I left you in the field, I finished those letters to you and Chrom as quickly as I could, packed a few things, and then just ran," the man reminisced. "I just wanted to get as far away from you all that I possibly could so I wouldn't be able to inflict any more harm. I knew that Chrom would try to follow me, so I tried to cover my tracks as best I could with concealment spells from an old tome I brought along. He tried to send out Panne and Yarne to find me, didn't he?"

"Hmm? Yeah, but they stopped after a while because they said they couldn't pick up on your scent."

"I thought so. The spells were designed to both cover any physical evidence like footprints and any smells so animals, or taguets, couldn't hunt me down," Robin explained. "Anyways, the first two days or so weren't too bad. The urge to get away fueled me during the day and I would collapse with exhaustion at night. But after then, Grima started getting to me. Provoking the headaches more and more, speaking to me, telling me lies, and gradually, I started to believe him. Every day became me putting up walls in my mind only for Grima to break them all down when I slept, or when I tried to sleep at least. I...I started to forget who I was. Was I the Robin who I thought I was with the Shepherds, or was I the Robin he said I was meant to be? I guess you can see a little bit of that struggle in the last page or two of this..."

"But I still don't-" Lucina took a long yawn, interrupting her own sentence. "I still don't understand why you tried to burn your journal though. Wouldn't it help you to look through it to remind yourself of who you really were?"

"You're right," Robin agreed. "I'm not really sure what I was thinking. I think there was some part of me that didn't want

any of you to see these last few pages and how mental I had become if you did find me, but I also think that Grima had the same thought as you. He... didn't want me to have it, so in the middle of one particularly bad headache, he made me throw it into the fire and leave it there. I left that spot right after, so I must not have seen the fire go out."

"Hmm."

"I felt like I didn't belong. I was the whole package: tired, cold, hungry, lonely, scared... I dreadfully wanted to see all your faces again, but I thought I would never be able to go back. Then Grima started to tell me to go to Plegia. Go to the Dragon's Table. I tried to resist, because I knew something terrible was going to happen there, but he led me there regardless. I saw you all fighting the Deadlords and I wanted to stay back, but then I saw you getting attacked, and then you know the rest... Is there anything else you want to hear?" His question was met with silence. "Lucina?"

Robin glanced down at her closed eyes and felt the steady rise and fall of her breathing as she rubbed up against him. "You're asleep..." he murmured softly to himself and glanced ahead, unsure of how to act next. Trying to move as little as he could as to not disturb her, he reached out with his left leg and stomped the fire out with his boot. He tucked the book amidst the folds of the blanket, and then very slowly turned around so Lucina's head fell gently into his chest. With his arms freed, Robin took his end of the blanket and wrapped it around her until she was bundled up snugly.

"Come on," he spoke to her quietly, easing one arm underneath her legs and the other behind her back. "Bedtime." Lucina frowned slightly at being disturbed but didn't wake up as Robin lifted her from the crate. Taking a moment to shift her into a more comfortable position, he began carrying her back to her tent. It seemed like they were the only ones left outside; all the other Shepherds had already retired for the night. The only sounds were those of Robin's boots against the earth and the faint noises of insects in the distance. It was very quiet...

"Robin!"

The man was so startled by the sudden, loud cry of his name that he almost dropped Lucina right on the ground. She frowned again and squeezed her eyes shut tighter for a moment at being jerked forward, and Robin stood absolutely still until her face relaxed.

"What are you doing out so late?" the voice sounded again. Robin turned around to find Chrom walking up to him from behind. "You need to go to bed."

Robin gave the other man a sharp gaze and, unable to move his arms, made a quick nod of his head down at the girl in his arms.

Chrom must not have even noticed her at first, for he mouthed an "Oh" as soon as Robin turned and fell silent.

"What are you doing up?" Robin whispered as soon as he got close.

"I was coming back from guard duty," Chrom explained. "What are *you* doing with my daughter, may I ask?"

"We were just sitting and talking and then she fell asleep, so I was bringing her back to bed for the night."

Chrom glanced down at Lucina's sleeping face and a smile slowly came to his lips. "She looks happy." He placed a gloved hand on Robin's shoulder and looked him square in the eyes. "She missed you dearly, Robin," he told him, taking another glance at his daughter before adding "Take care of her, okay?"

"Thank you, Chrom," Robin smiled.

The other man acknowledged him with a nod and released his shoulder, setting off on his way back to his own tent. He snuck one more look back at them, and then vanished down the path as he took a turn.

Robin shook his head, smile still present on his face, and continued in the opposite direction to Lucina's tent. Upon arrival, he turned sideways and guided Lucina inside with feet first so that they would both fit through the tent flap without knocking anything over. It probably would have been pitch dark if there wasn't a small candle already lit inside. The flame must have been burning for a while, and Robin was thankful that it hadn't gone out so he could still see. He gently placed her head down first on the pillow before releasing the rest of her body, and found himself gazing upon her with a smile on his face. She always presented herself as serious and independent, but here she was now sleeping like a small child with a peaceful expression. He felt privileged in a way to be able to see this side of her.

"Why do you have to be so cute when you sleep?" he asked under his breath, blushing as soon as he said it even though she couldn't hear him. For a second, he thought he saw her lips flash a smile, but it must have just been a trick of the wavering candlelight. Robin sighed and leaned over her again to unwrap the blanket from around her, removing his journal in the process and setting down on the chair in the corner of the tent. Tossing the blanket to the side for the

moment, he lifted one of her feet into the air and began to tuck at her boot. Lucina grunted and made an attempt to pull her leg away, shifting around restlessly.

"Come on, Lucina," Robin laughed softly. "It will be much more comfortable to sleep without these on. I'll get them for you. Don't worry." With quite some effort, he managed to pry both her boots off, and then he placed them on the floor near the foot of her bed. As soon as Robin was finished, Lucina curled up her toes and tucked her legs close to her body, able to relax once more.

For a split second, Robin considered removing her tunic so her collar wouldn't be rubbing up against her neck, but he quickly decided against it. She was still wearing her undershirt underneath, but he figured she would get the wrong idea if she did wake up and he would probably die of embarrassment right then and there. Once he was sure that she was settled, Robin took two corners of the blanket and threw it over her, pulling it up to her shoulders.

"Goodnight, Lucina," he whispered, and leaned down to kiss her on the cheek.

Just as he turned to leave, her hand shot out and seized him by the back of his shirt. Almost immediately she was leaning up on her other arm, and her eyes looked up at him desperately. "Wait, Robin! Don't go!"

"L...Lucina! Y...You're awake? What do you mean don't go?"

"I want you to stay here," she pleaded.

"You mean through the night?"

She nodded.

"Umm... But..." Robin stammered, taken completely off guard by her question. "I...I mean, I don't have a problem with it, but s...sharing the same bed is traditionally reserved for two people who are ma-"

"It's okay!" Lucina interjected, not hearing his last statement. "I'm used to it."

"Y...You are?" Robin's face turned even redder than it had earlier. He never thought that Lucina of all people... "With w...who, exactly?" He could practically feel his heart drop out of his chest and fall onto the ground.

"A bunch of different people."

"W...What?"

"In the future. Well, not sharing a *bed* I suppose." Just like she had before, Lucina had no idea why Robin was getting so flustered. "It was too dangerous most nights to light fires because the Risen would see them, and blankets were sparse, so my friends and I had to huddle up for warmth on cold nights. Sometimes even with other younger children who had lost their parents in the fighting like we did. I know I don't make it seem like I enjoy physical contact that often, but it was a necessary action for survival."

Robin released the deepest sigh of relief in his life that his fears had been proven false. An image of Lucina huddling up to other orphaned children to conserve body heat in the freezing nights of winter flashed through his mind, and he suddenly felt extremely guilty. "I'm sorry..."

"Don't be, Robin. It wasn't your fault."

"Okay..." He shifted his weight from side to side uneasily. "Do... you still want me to stay then?"

"Yes, please." She slid over to the other side of the bed to make room for him.

Robin still was a little unsure of how to act. He didn't want to seem too sudden, so he simply took off his own boots and sat on the side of the bed, placing his feet in front of him.

Lucina let go of his shirt and relaxed her head back down into the pillow, giving Robin a strange look when she noticed him still sitting. "You can lie down, silly," she smiled. "I don't think you'll be able to sleep sitting up."

"A...Are you really sure you're fine with this? I don't want to make this seem uncomfortable for you..."

"I'm fine, Robin. I'll be more uncomfortable if you're just sitting there. Besides, my father just said that he was happy with us being together."

"If it's okay with you..." Robin reasoned, gradually relaxing himself down on top of the blanket. "Wait... You heard what

Chrom said?" He blinked a few times, realizing that she *had* heard everything he said. "You've been awake this whole time, haven't you?"

"Maybe."

"So you could have walked but just wanted me to carry you?" Robin raised his eyebrows dramatically in mock disapproval.

"I felt like I deserved to be treated like a princess for five minutes of my life," Lucina grinned, returning his playful expression with one of her own. "Isn't it the prince's job to carry around the princess when she's tired?"

"I suppose I can't argue with that."

She leaned upright once more and tugged the blanket out from under him. She then took great care in draping it over his shoulders before tucking herself back in as well. "What's the matter, Robin?" she asked after a period of silence, playfulness gone from her voice and replaced with concern. "You're all tense. Do you not want to sleep here? B...Because you can leave... if you want... I won't mind..."

"No, that isn't it! I just wanted to make sure..." He paused to snuff out the candle by the bedside, and then turned his head to his side so that they were facing each other from across the pillow. "I'm the only one you've ever asked to do this, r...right? There isn't anybody else?"

"Robin..." Lucina squirmed close enough to him so that she could tuck her head underneath his chin. "How many times do I have to tell you that you're the first person I've ever loved and the only person I'll ever be able to love?"

"Good," the man grinned. "I can say the exact same to you."

Lucina laughed and closed her eyes. "You know, I've been thinking, and I just realized something. We've told you so many times that we'll help you fight off Grima, and we all mean it, but in the end it really is all just on you, isn't it? No matter what we say, you're the only one who has to carry that burden."

"I can do it, Lucina. The support alone is a great help."

"But I want to help you even more. I want to be there right with you and fight Grima by your side." she insisted, pressing her body even closer into his. "Maybe tonight, we'll share the same dream, and I can take away some of your pain..." She let out another yawn. "Goodnight, Robin."

"Goodnight," Robin repeated, easing his arms around her. He suddenly felt how tired he really was after so many restless nights, and keeping his eyes open became an almost impossible task. Sleep overtook him as quickly as it had her, and for once, the voice that haunted his mind was completely and utterly silent.

You didn't drown in the sea of fluff, did you? Good!

If you haven't noticed already, I am the *biggest* sucker for sleep scenes and think that they're so darn adorable that I needed to write one of my own! Waiting to write this chapter has been a major driving force in my life.

I really wanted to show more of the childlike side to Lucina's personality that's too often overlooked! A bunch of people think she's a flat character, but I think they're forgetting the other side to her that isn't really as obvious, like in her supports with her mother regarding her fashion sense. It's a shame though because you can write about her two different ways and it would totally be canon! Anyways...

Sweet, sweet, naive Lucina. She doesn't know too much about flirting in more *ahem* serious relationships (or flirting in general), and thus can make the whole scene quite awkward for Robin at least when she does something that was a totally normal action for her in the future that Robin sees... quite differently. Let's just say Lucina never received the full version of "the talk" from her parents because she was still too young when they died... She's aware of the concept and all, but doesn't quite know yet what actions can be perceived in a different light. As for Robin, this means heavy blushing and getting flustered. It all adds up to a much more awkward yet cuter scene anyways, so it's all good!

I hope this explained some more of Robin's feelings regarding the whole running away, getting his headaches, and trying to burn his journal stuff. We didn't get much of his reaction when he first came back, so hopefully this chapter tied up a few loose ends!

These two deserved at least one happy chapter together after everything they've been through. Grima can take his

jolly good time recharging his energy somewhere. Sleep scene is *much* more important.

Unfortunately as a warning I probably won't be able to get another chapter posted for a week or two... I hope you guys will understand, but it's my junior year of high school and I have big AP tests I have to study for and do well on! They're all over by the end of the first week in May, so I'll do my best to get the next chapter written after then! I just wanted to let you guys know so you *won't* freak out that I've abandoned this story, because I will not I assure you! Sometimes annoying schoolwork just gets in the way from writing about the OTP. I'll still be available to respond back to reviews and PMs though if you want to talk! I hope you enjoyed this chapter and that you can bear with me for the next two weeks!

Chapter 21: Her Mask

I'm *finally* back with the next chapter! This took too long to finish with all my schoolwork... I'm so sorry... *cries* Such a long wait in between chapters won't happen again, especially now that summer break is right around the corner for me! Thank you so much to all you loyal readers who held out with me for all this time! I decided to mix things up and give you a chapter that revolves more around Robin as opposed to Lucina like we're usually used to! Enjoy!

In which Owain discovers something shocking and Robin is taught valuable lessons

Chapter 21 – Her Mask

Lucina was warm. It was a comfortable warmth, the kind that one could feel on a particularly special spring day when the sun tickled one's skin after so many cold, winter nights. It was enough to make her not want to open her eyes. It was even enough to make her want to curl up and sleep the afternoon away instead of rising at dawn like she always did...

But the harsh realities of life crept into her briefly untroubled mind, and she knew she would have to get up. Grima fouled the world with his very presence, and at this very instant he was likely harvesting ancient powers from the land to restore his own life force. He threatened to block out that spring sun forever. The army needed to get to Mount Prism right away and awaken the Falchion's true strength, and then they could force the Fell Dragon back to its slumber, and *then* maybe she could enjoy the warmth she felt.

She reached to wipe her still closed eyes, but found that she couldn't move her arm at all. Lucina tried again. There was something holding it down. Her other arm wasn't able to move either. For a brief moment she panicked and began to struggle, eyes opening wide to discover the source of her restraints. She sighed deeply and relaxed again. Lucina had almost forgotten why she was feeling so warm.

Robin was lying next to her and had propped himself up on his side, giving him the optimal position to wrap his arms tightly around her sides. Her squirming from before made the man gradually tighten his grip, and he pulled her closer into his chest in a subconscious effort to calm her. His head rested on the pillow mere inches from hers, and his sleeping face showed no signs of any strain or unpleasant nightmares. For the first time since he had returned, he looked completely at peace.

They both probably should have been up a little while ago; the sun was already in the sky and illuminating the inside of the tent with a faint morning light. She didn't want to wake him though. He was probably exhausted after everything he had been through. Judging from Robin's worries about staying the night, leaving him asleep here might cause a slight problem when her father started looking for him, especially because he was here in *her* tent...

Moving very slowly, Lucina twisted one of her hands free just enough so that she could reach up and rub his bare arm. "Robin," she whispered, trying to get his attention.

"Hmm?" he murmured in reply. He repositioned the arm that Lucina was touching slightly, contented smile forming on his lips.

"It's time to get up, Robin." The face he was making was cute, and she had to repress a laugh.

"Not yet, love," the man responded in a distant voice, squeezing her sides.

He must be dreaming, Lucina figured. She couldn't help herself and let out a lighthearted giggle. Robin's smile widened at the sound. She wriggled her arm free from his grip with considerable effort and reached up to stroke his cheek with the back of one finger. "Robin," she whispered again. "It's time to get up."

"We have all the time in the world, love," Robin sighed between breaths. "We can stay here forever..."

Lucina decided to play along and responded in a sing-song voice. "I wish we did, love." The man seemed happier that she had referred to him as such. "And we could. We just have some things we have to do first." She made an attempt to sit upright. "Just a few more things."

Robin immediately pulled her back down into bed, looking suddenly distraught. His grip was almost forceful, and she was surprised by how strong he was to be able to restrain her so easily. "Don't leave!" he begged softly, still asleep. "Don't leave me..." His voice had changed so suddenly, and now it sounded like he was about to break out in sobs. "Don't go..."

"I won't leave," Lucina soothed. "I won't." She closed the gap between their faces, just barely touching his lips she gave him a light kiss. His face relaxed immediately and his hold on her became more gentle. "We just have to wake up now, okay?"

"You stay here for a little longer," Robin urged. "I'll bring you breakfast in bed, love. Whatever you want... I'll make it just for you..."

"But you have to get up for that, right?" Lucina reasoned with him.

The man frowned at her question, subconsciously pondering it for a moment before replying. "But I don't want to..." He pouted like a small child who was losing an argument. "Five more minutes..."

As much as Lucina enjoyed it, this was getting nowhere fast. "Robin," she spoke a little louder, shaking his shoulder softly. "We have to get up."

"Huh?" he groaned, having been snapped out of his dream. His eyes opened ever so slightly, just enough so that Lucina could see the warm brown of his irises from behind his eyelashes. "What time is it?"

"Probably past when we should be getting up."

"Hmm..." The man opened his eyes wider in order to get a better look at her face. "Good morning, Lucy." He gave a tired smile and moved his hands behind her head, guiding it so he could kiss her on the forehead.

"Lucy?" she asked, a little surprised at the use of the nickname. Only Cynthia had ever used it. "When did you start calling me that?"

"I don't know. I heard your sister use it yesterday and I thought it sounded cute," Robin replied, looking still half-asleep as his eyelids fluttered shut. "A cute nickname for a cute girl."

Lucina had always scolded Cynthia for calling her Lucy, but for some reason it seemed perfectly okay when Robin used the name. She couldn't find any complaints, even though she still preferred being called by her actual name... "Anyways... We should probably get ready to march, Robin. We have to reach Mount Prism as soon as we can."

"I know," he sighed. "But I'm so tired, and you're so comfortable..."

"Me or my bed?"

"Both," the man grinned. "I could go for a few more hours of sleep to tell you the truth..." His voice began to drift away into dreams again.

"But what if my father comes looking for us? He'd want us awake."

Robin's eyes shot open and he immediately released her, pulling his arms close to his own body and rising to a rigid sitting position. "Oh gods oh gods oh gods..." he muttered under his breath, looked more terrified than tired. He threw off his side of the blanket and hurriedly clambered out of the bed. "D...Did Chrom come here?! Because if he did... Oh gods, he'd get the *completely* wrong idea!"

Lucina sat up and cocked her head to one side. "No, he didn't come. What do you mean he would get the wrong idea? What wrong idea would he get?"

"Umm, I mean, we were sleeping in the same bed and I lost track of time and I must have been holding you in my sleep in a way that would *look*..." he stammered, sentences slurring together as he struggled to pull on his boots.

"That's fine, isn't it?"

"Nevermind! It's nothing! Nothing to worry about!" Robin held up his hands in guilt and gave a nervous laugh, remembering Lucina's similar confusion last night. "B...But if Chrom d...does ask you anything, just say that..." He paused, glancing around the tent until his eyes fell on his journal that Lucina had returned to him. "J...Just say that I came in to see how you were doing this morning and that you kept me for a little while to give me this." He snatched up the book from the chair where he had put it last night and held it up for her to see. "And then I left to... to go check on Morgan! Right!" He nodded, as if reassuring himself that it was a good plan. "Just going to check on my daughter."

"O...Okay... I can tell him that if you want," Lucina nodded.

"Good," Robin sighed, scratching the back of his head and looking slightly more relieved. "B...But don't bring it up to him!"

Only if he asks why I was *here*! If he doesn't know I was here, just say you think I overslept!"

"I suppose..." Lucina swung out of bed and placed her feet on the ground. "Why do we have to be so secretive about it though?"

"Umm, I can maybe explain better once we stop Grima." Robin looked away, face turning red as he shuffled his feet nervously. "I...I should probably go." He peered out of a slit in the flap of the tent to make sure that no one was around to see him leave, and as soon as he was sure that the coast was clear he slipped outside. After a second or two he pushed his head back through to steal another moment with her. "See you a bit." He gave her a timid wave before disappearing.

Lucina smiled and shook her head as she slipped on one of her boots. He was sweet when he got all flustered.

"Oh gods," Robin hissed under his breath to himself as he hurriedly walked down the path through camp. "Oh gods, I'm such an idiot! I shouldn't have stayed the night!" he scolded, hitting himself in the forehead with the back of his hand. "Not only will Chrom slit my throat if he finds out, I won't be able to get within thirty feet of her ever again without him burning holes through my head... And he'll be extra cautious with me near her anyway with Morgan being here..." He glanced around to make sure no one was within earshot, and then suddenly became conscious of what he was doing. "And I'm talking to myself..." he murmured, taking his one-sided conversation into his head. *As if you hadn't already gone off the deep end, now you're talking to yourself like the lunatic you are. Way to go playing the part, Robin...*

"Hey, Robin!"

"Gah!" The man jumped in surprise and swung around frantically.

"Oh, I'm sorry! Did I scare you?" Cordelia apologized, jogging up from behind him. "I didn't expect you to be so jittery."

Robin inhaled deeply in an attempt to recollect himself. "N...No, it's not your fault, Cordelia... I j...just haven't been too good with sudden noises as of lately." He allowed a nervous laugh to escape his throat and regretted doing so immediately. *Way to go playing the part...*

"I'll be sure not to startle you again. I should have known better after everything you've gone through..." The woman didn't seem to mind his insanity and held out a neatly folded bundle of clothes to him. "Here, these are yours."

"My clothes?" Robin gingerly took the pile from her hands. "What do you have these for?"

"Sorry," Cordelia shrugged with a laugh. "I saw them drying on the clothesline outside and couldn't help but notice a few faint stains and dirt granules still on them, so I washed them again for you. I hope you don't mind."

"You didn't have to do this for me," Robin told her, holding up the shirt he had been wearing yesterday. "You even stitched this one up good as new... How long did this take you?"

"Oh, no time at all!" she insisted with a wave of her hand. "I figured you always do so much for us that it was about time for me to at least try to help you with something. It's the least I could do honestly."

"Well the least you could do seems like it was awfully out of your way. You're too modest. Thank you, Cordelia. I truly appreciate it."

"You do? I was afraid it wouldn't be enough..."

Robin removed his coat from the bottom of the pile and began to unfold it when he froze. "W...Wait, d...did you touch the tea stain on the bottom?"

"My goodness, I almost forgot about that!" Cordelia cried. "I meant to get that for you too, but it wouldn't come out with just soap and water."

Robin stuffed the rest of the pile underneath his arm with his journal and held up the coat with both hands, allowing it to fall open so he could see the lower right corner. "It's still there..."

"I can get it out for you!" Cordelia insisted, fingers wrapping around one of the sleeves and giving it a soft tug. "I have a special method to get those kinds of stains out of clothes, and I was just about to do so before I saw you walking by."

"N...No! It's okay!" Robin pleaded, yanking the coat from out of her grasp and slipping it on.

"It won't be that much work, Robin. I can get it out in no time at all."

"It's okay!" the man repeated. "I...I like it there..."

"You like... the stain?" Cordelia raised an eyebrow.

"W...Well, not just the stain, but the story behind the stain."

"Oh? Do tell then. It must be interesting."

"M...Maybe later." Robin tried to end the conversation, quickly adding, "It's a long story."

"Hmm... If you're okay with it..." Cordelia still seemed like she wanted to ask more questions but she kept her mouth shut. "Let me know if you change your mind though! I'd be more than happy to help."

"Yes, perfectly okay," he reassured. "Thank you again, Cordelia."

"Don't mention it," the woman smiled and turned to leave. "It's good to have you back, Robin."

Robin watched her go before heading back on his way, holding the right end of his coat up as he walked. *Thank the gods she didn't wash it out...* He ran his thumb down the edge of the coat, noting the change in the fabric's texture as his hand reached the stain. *I didn't tell Lucina that this helped while I was gone as well...* Whenever he saw it, he was immediately able to match the discolored spot to the memory of getting it. Even though it wasn't the happiest memory he had shared with Lucina, it was the best he had retained during a time when he feared that he would forget everything about her. No matter how unkempt it may make him seem, he wouldn't want to remove it for anything.

As he walked by the mess tent, Robin barely noticed the orange haired man trying to get his attention. He was too wrapped up in his own thoughts, and again he was startled when the man called to him.

"Hey, Bubbles!" he cried. "Stay there!" Gaius ducked inside the tent for a moment, emerging with a large plate covered by a domed lid. He trotted over to Robin's side, keeping the lid held tightly shut over the plate as he did so. "I've got a fresh breakfast here with your name on it, Bubbles." He removed off the lid to reveal a dish piled high with steaming, golden-brown pancakes. A thin layer of syrup overflowed down the side of the stack in a few places, and there were copious amounts of powdered sugar sprinkled over the top. The sight of the food alone made Robin's mouth start to water.

"T...This is for me?" he asked, eagerly accepting the plate.

"Well, you didn't show up for breakfast today, and I figured that you would probably be starving for something... as delicious as those..." Gaius murmured, becoming entranced by the food. "And with... all that... powdered sugar..."

"Gaius..."

"Oh, right! Sorry about that..." The other man tore his eyes away from the plate. "I was cooking like I usually do in the mornings, so I decided to save you the best looking ones for when you woke up." Gaius leaned in closer to Robin and lowered his voice. "I even took the liberty to add a bit of my secret stash of powdered sugar that I keep in an undisclosed location as a special something. *This* tastes good on anything."

"Anything?"

"Anything," the man nodded. "Give me any meal you can think of, I'll spread some of this stuff all over it, and that meal becomes *at least* twice as tasty. Money back guaranteed."

"Twice as much, huh? You make a hard-to-resist offer, Gaius," Robin smiled. "One that my aching stomach can't refuse." He picked up the fork lying on the plate with one hand and held it poised to stab into the pancake stack. "May I?"

"Be my guest, Bubbles," Gaius smirked and folded his arms, leaning back on the heels of his boots to admire the fruits of his labor.

Robin piled the fork as high as he could manage with food and shoved it in his mouth, chewing slowly to savor the taste. Mouth still full, he looked at Gaius with wide eyes and simply began nodding.

"Pretty good, huh?" Gaius seemed rather pleased with Robin's reaction.

Robin swallowed hard so he could speak. "Yeah... These are *really* good..."

"Sweet." The other man removed a fresh lollipop from the folds of his cloak, ripped off the wrapping, and slid the candy

into his mouth. Biting down on the stick, he pointed down at the food in warning. "You'd better eat that quick, Bubbles. If Stahl finds out I kept some extra pancakes from him when I declined his request for thirds, my whole candy stash he promised he wouldn't touch will be gone in minutes..."

"I'll keep that in mind," Robin noted, taking another large bite.

Gaius moved his lollipop into his other cheek with his tongue and glanced back into the mess tent. "I should probably finish cleaning up the kitchen then for the march today..."

"Do you need any help, Gaius?" Robin offered.

"Nah, I'm good. You eat those delicious pancakes. I'm almost done anyway." The orange haired man waved him off. "You deserve a break, Bubbles."

"Oh..." That was the second thing in a matter of five minutes that someone had done for him without asking anything in return. "T...Thank you for breakfast, Gaius."

"No prob. It's what pals do, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I g...guess it is." He grinned as the other man strolled back into the tent. "Wait! Um, Gaius?" he asked, remembering who he was looking for. "Have you seen Morgan anywhere today?"

Gaius paused and put a finger to his chin. "Huh... Let's see... The last I saw her, Bubbles Junior was with Stumbles. Don't know where they went after breakfast though."

Robin nodded and set off to look for them, waving goodbye to Gaius as he left. He stopped by Chrom and Sumia's tent first but couldn't hear anyone inside. Not particularly willing to enter without being invited in, he decided the stables would be the next best place to check. Sumia was always there tending to her pegasus.

"Sumia?" Robin asked, peeking his head through the stable doors. "Are you in there?"

"Nope!" a voice called back cheerfully. "It's just me, divine pegasus warrior Cynthia!"

"And I, scion of legend with a hand that thirsts for justice!"

Upon stepping foot inside, he found both Cynthia and Owain hunched over a large crate, examining a piece of paper covered in crude drawings. Both seemed rather excited to see him, and they quickly rolled up the paper and rushed to his side.

"Hoy there, Robin!" Owain placed one hand over his face, assuming his usual stance.

"Hello Future Big Brother!" Cynthia grinned, swinging her hands by her sides.

"Future Big Brother?" Robin asked confusedly. "Me?"

"Um, duh!" the girl laughed. "Of course you! You're like, Lucy's favorite person in the whole wide world! I'm only predicting the inevitable!"

Robin blushed and looked away. "I...I don't know what you mean..."

"You big fibber! I thought you were super smart!" Cynthia gave him a playful punch in the arm. "One day you and Lucy are gonna get married and have a whole bunch of extra cute *and* extra heroic babies!"

"Lucina wouldn't..."

"I mean, Morgan's gotta come from somewhere, doesn't she?" the girl added.

She technically wasn't wrong... *But how in Naga's name would Lucina ever want to have a child with me in any timeline after everything I've done? It's...* Robin considered the word "unthinkable," but in doing so the exact thought materialized in his head. He could practically feel his face burning up in embarrassment, and he moved his free hand to cover his cheeks in a desperate attempt to hide it. He pushed the thought away before it could solidify in his mind. *Gods... Why do I want to be with her so damn much?*

Owain didn't seem to catch on as to why Robin was blushing so much, and instead became inspired by the man's action of covering his face. "Robin... Can it be? You have been in possession of a quivering sword hand as well?! And you have been remiss in informing me of this fact?" he asked, looking betrayed.

"N...N...No! I...I don't have a s...sword hand!" Robin stuttered.

"Ah, my sixth sense has bequeathed an explanation upon my being..." Owain looked upwards and closed his eyes as if he was receiving some kind of heavenly message. "From the very moment you saw me, you knew about the limitless power that flows through my veins! My very soul!" He held his hand up dramatically and paused for some kind of intended effect before continuing. "It was written in a five thousand year old prophecy that should the two heroes who are both blessed and cursed with sword hands ever meet, they shall be eternal rivals! For eternity! And they shall duel with ferocity until the end of time!"

"Whoa, really?" Cynthia asked, amazed. "What happens at the end of time then? Who wins? Because the hero would obviously always win, but you said that both were heroes!"

"That's exactly the point, fellow pursuer of justice!" Owain grinned. "Neither wins! They are forever locked in a perpetual stalemate because neither one's power may surpass the other! I can feel the sword hand's hunger for battle already... It will take every ounce of my willpower to hold it back! Beware, Robin!" he cried, restraining one of his arms with the other. "Once our blades lock, we may never again emerge from our duel!"

"Hey Robin!" Cynthia asked, so inspired by Owain's speech that she was practically bouncing up and down. "Do you think all of the kids you and Lucy will have are going to possess limitless power too?"

"S...Stop talking about our kids!" Robin begged, new wave of embarrassment washing over him.

"Good morning, Robin," Frederick suddenly entered the stable leading a group of horses with saddlebags already packed to the brim for the march. He paused when Robin turned to face him, and a look of concern developed on the knight's face. "Your face is awfully red, Robin... Pray tell, are you feeling ill? I can fetch Lady Lissa if you so desire."

"I...I'm fine! I just..."

"We were talking about him and Lucina-"

"No, we're n...not talking about that anymore!" the man cried, beginning to feel faint. "All I wanted to do was find where Morgan and Sumia went!"

"They're in Morgan's tent," Frederick explained. "I believe they wanted to partake in a family bonding experience if I'm not mistaken."

"W...What?" Cynthia gasped. "They're doing girl things and I wasn't invited?! That's not fair!"

"B...But if you leave, I won't have anyone to play w- I mean, fight the sinister forces of treachery and evil with!" Owain protested.

"Oh, right! I almost forgot! We were in the middle of coming up with strategies to beat Grima with!" the girl exclaimed. "Sorry about that, Owain! Girl things will have to wait!"

"Aye! We still need to perfect our top secret plans on how to fell the Fell Dragon!" the man nodded, holding the rolled sheet of paper up in his hand. "Care to examine them, Robin?"

"I...I have to go sorry!" Robin stammered quickly, rushing outside before Cynthia could fantasize out loud about his personal life again. Ducking behind another tent, he crouched low to the ground where he couldn't be seen in order to recompose himself. *Good gods, that was embarrassing*, he sighed to himself. *Why did I get so flustered though? That barely happened before I left...* Waiting until he was sure that his cheeks had returned to their normal color, he sought out his daughter's tent and stood outside the tent flap. He could hear Morgan and Sumia talking inside, and he just wanted to make sure he wasn't interrupting anything they were doing.

"Hey kiddo," he called. "Can I come in?"

"Father! Is that you?" his daughter's voice responded eagerly. "Yeah, come in!"

Robin peered inside to find the two both sitting on the bed. Morgan was holding a few long strands of Sumia's hair and appeared to be braiding it. "Well, I see you two have been busy."

"Grandmother and I were talking and doing each other's hair, Father!" Morgan grinned, holding what she had finished of Sumia's braid for him to see. "Isn't it pretty?"

"Yes, very. What were you talking about if you don't mind me asking?" Robin inquired.

"Grandmother was telling me stories about baby Mother, and she sounds really cute!" Morgan explained. "It's weird that there's one Mother in this time who's younger than I am, but it's kind of cool too! I guess little Mother will grow up to be a different kind of person though, so both Mothers are special! ...Oh! I almost forgot! Are you feeling okay today, Father?" Her voice became a bit more somber. "You were feeling sad last night..."

"I'm better now. Thanks for thinking about me, kiddo." Robin gave a soft smile.

"That's what I've gotta do! Make sure Mother and Father aren't sad!" The girl seemed very proud of herself, and then her attention shifted elsewhere. "On an unrelated note, are you going to finish that last yummy-looking pancake you have, Father?"

"Do you want it?" Robin asked, offering out the plate for her to take. "I don't need it."

"Yes, please!" the girl accepted the food graciously, cutting a large piece of the pancake off with the fork and stuffing it in her mouth. "You're the best, Dad," she mumbled in between bites.

Robin watched as the girl devoured the rest of the meal in a matter of seconds, and once she had finished he reached out and wiped her chin with his thumb. "You've got crumbs all over your face, kiddo," he noted, brushing the tiny bits of food from her lips.

"Ha ha! That's just what Mother did a few days ago!" Morgan laughed. "She wiped my face with her hand too. I didn't think I was such a messy eater, but I guess I kind of am."

"Your mother did the same thing?" Robin asked. "I didn't even have to think about doing it... The urge just came to me. Gods, are we becoming parents?"

"Most likely," Sumia nodded with a chuckle. "One of the many instincts new parents get is keeping their children all tidy and presentable."

"So does that mean that he has the instinct to brush my hair too, Grandmother?" the girl asked excitedly, practically leaping into her father's lap. "Can you, Dad? Please, please, *please*? I want some Daddy time!"

"Um, I would love to, Morgan. But I... don't really know... how..."

"Robin!" Sumia gasped. "Are you telling me you've never used a hairbrush in your entire life?!"

"N...No! I brush my own hair! I've just never brushed someone else's before..." Robin hesitated, holding the brush in an unsteady hand. "I don't want to mess up..."

"Goodness, Robin," the woman sighed, taking the brush from him. "Well, it's an important skill to have, especially for you. Sooner or later Lucina will be wanting you to do hers."

"Really? Lucina doesn't seem like the kind of person who would be too concerned with these kinds of things. N...Not saying she isn't concerned about cleanliness! T...That isn't what I m...meant!" Robin stammered to clarify.

"Oh, she'll never ask you about it," Sumia explained. "She just makes herself seem like she doesn't enjoy things like having her hair brushed. Lucina doesn't want to come off as too girlish, but trust me from personal experience. She might complain at first, but she would let me play with her hair for hours if time permitted." She began to make a few smooth strokes with the brush through Morgan's hair as an example. "She would honestly love it coming from you, Robin. No matter what she tells you, she enjoys a little pampering from time to time. Most girls do, you know."

"Yeah, Mother would probably really like that," Morgan added. "You should try it sometime, Dad."

"Huh... I should probably start practicing then," Robin mused.

"Fortunately for you, you happen to have a daughter to practice with who has shorter hair." Sumia handed the hairbrush back to him and urged him to get started. "Short hair is even easier to manage than long hair. A smart guy like you should have no problem figuring it out."

"It's easy, Dad! I'll sit extra still if you want," Morgan offered, tensing her muscles and making her body as stiff as she possibly could.

"Um, you could relax a little bit more, Morgan... You can be still without going rigid. It's... actually really unnerving when you do that..."

"Whoops. Sorry," the girl apologized, easing herself like she was told until she was comfortable. "My hair is yours to mold into a work of art, Father! Brush away!"

"Work of art? I'm not sure I'm up to that challenge yet, but I'll try..." He tried copying Sumia's actions to the best of his ability, gradually becoming more comfortable with every stroke of the hairbrush. "Morgan, I'm not hurting you, am I? I'm not brushing too hard or anything?"

"Don't worry! It feels nice," the girl sighed happily for a split second before wincing. "Ow!"

Immediately Robin pulled the brush away, looking appalled with himself. "W...What's wrong? I c...can't even brush hair right without hurting someone, can I?"

Sumia was already examining the strand of hair that Robin had just been brushing. "It's not your fault, Robin," she reassured. "She just has a little knot in her hair, that's all. Nothing that can't be fixed. I can show you how to get it out if you'd like."

"I...It won't hurt her, will it?"

"Not at all. All you have to do is hold the hair that's knotted in one hand a little closer to the roots so she won't feel you tugging on it, and the most effective method when dealing with knots like these is just to use your fingers to comb them out." She demonstrated once and allowed Robin to finish what she started.

He made sure to keep his combing and brushing as soft and slow as he could manage to avoid tugging at Morgan's hair again from that point on. Sumia couldn't help but notice how well he was doing considering how nervous he had been to try. She wasn't about to tell him, but it wasn't really as easy to brush a woman's hair as she had presented it to be. Many men failed miserably at first because they were too unknowingly rough or violent. It may have just been Robin's strategically tuned mind, but he was especially careful with every stroke he made and frequently shifted to combing with his fingers when he suspected even the slightest tangle to be present. It was strangely fascinating to watch him work.

"Are you okay, Morgan? You haven't said anything for a while," Robin noted after a few minutes, voice significantly calmer than it had been before. He patted a few loose strands of her cobalt hair down with his hand and finally placed the hairbrush on the bedside next to him. "That's the best I can do I suppose... I know it's not a work of art like you requested, but I just hope I didn't mess up too badly..."

"Are you kidding? You're like, a professional, Father," Morgan replied, resting the back of her head on Robin's shoulder and yawning softly. "I probably would have fallen asleep if you kept up. You're very relaxing. Much better than Grandfather." She exchanged looks with Sumia and the two giggled.

"Chrom doesn't share a hidden talent for hair-brushing like I do, apparently?" Robin asked with a smile on his face. "Not even with two sisters, a wife, and two, well, three, daughters?"

"Gods, no," Sumia managed to reply, unable to stop her laughter. "He offered to help with my hair *once*. I can tell you with complete certainty that I will never let that man near me with a hairbrush again. I'm still not sure how he brushes his own hair in the morning, and I've been married to him for years!"

"Maybe he just doesn't have to brush it and it somehow turns out okay," Morgan suggested.

"Or Frederick does it for him," Robin snickered, triggering another laughing fit amongst the three of them.

"I wouldn't... be surprised," Sumia added as she tried to catch her breath. "We should probably get ready now for the march today."

"Already?" Morgan huffed. "But we *just* started Daddy-Daughter time! There's so much more stuff I still wanna do!" She held up her fingers and began counting down her list. "Like reading tomes and listening to Father's stories and playing games and talking about all the cool things I've done with Mother and learning how to be a better tactician from you! I need to learn all that I can if I ever want to be a match for you someday, Father! See? That's five things right off the top of my head! I could probably think of a whole bunch more!"

"How about tonight then?" Robin suggested. "I have a little strategy simulation that we could make into a game. That way we could do two of those things at the same time."

"You're so clever, Father!" Morgan exclaimed, leaping out of his lap in delight. "We'll put Daddy-Daughter time on hold until tonight! I'll bring my best tactical strategies to the table! I'm gonna make you so proud of me!"

"I look forward to it, kiddo."

The girl picked up her coat from the bed and threw it on as she walked over the tent flap. "Well, I promised Noire that I would stop by to say hello before we left. I'll be back to pack up the rest of my stuff once I'm done! I don't really have much anyway. Bye Father and Grandmother!"

"Oh, be careful not to trip on your way there, sweetie!" Sumia called to her as she began to walk outside. "My boots got caught on little rocks twice coming here from the mess tent, remember?"

"I'll be careful, Grandmother!" Morgan reassured and waved back before scampering off.

Sumia sighed and leaned back slightly on the bed, holding her arms behind her for support. "She's a good kid, Robin," she said after a minute of silence. "She loves you and Lucina to pieces."

"I'm lucky to have her." A smile flickered on his face before disappearing, and he looked down at his hands in his lap. He spoke slowly. "I don't remember if I mentioned anything about it to you before... but I'd always thought about how wonderful it would be to have a child someday. To start a family of my own, you know? To have someone who depended on me, who I could take care of, who would look up to me and think I was special no matter what..."

"It is a lovely feeling," Sumia agreed. "There's no other quite like it."

"I would get that feeling each time we met another one of the future children," he continued pensively. "It's just... whenever I saw the kids running up to their parents and giving them hugs and telling them how much they missed them, I couldn't help but want that just a little bit. Even though I knew it would never happen to me. I didn't have a child that came with them through time, so I just assumed that I wouldn't have a child anytime in the near future. Or at all even." He paused, looking at Sumia questioningly. "Not that I would ever wish to leave my child alone in such a terrible world, but is it wrong to want to feel missed by someone?"

Sumia was quiet for a moment before responding softly. "You want to be loved."

"I guess it... sounds a little pathetic when you... phrase it like that... but, yes, I suppose..."

"It isn't pathetic," she reassured. "It's a natural human desire. If it makes you feel any better, Robin, Morgan loves you immensely, and so does Lucina."

He considered her statement. "I'm sorry to trouble you with this, Sumia... You probably have more important things that you could be doing right now, but... if you would even know... what exactly does Lucina see in me?"

"...What does Lucina see in you? She hasn't told you what she likes about you?"

"N...No, that's not it... I just wanted to get your opinion, that's all."

"Hmm..." Sumia thought for a few moments as she worked on restoring her hair to its usual appearance. "Well, I can't speak for her directly, but I can tell you what I think from what she's told me if you'd like."

"Yes, that would be very helpful," Robin nodded.

Sumia began slowly. "I think that... in order to understand why Lucina loves you... you need to understand the kind of person that *she* really is. I'll try to explain as best as I can." She sighed deeply, breaking eye contact with Robin and staring blankly at the canvas wall. "Lucina... loves her friends and her family, and she'll undergo a great deal of personal risk to secure their safety. She's naturally cautious, but her desire to protect the people who she cares for can overcome her common sense and lead her to make rash decisions sometimes, like when she tried to kill you to protect Chrom..."

Robin looked down at the floor. *She probably should have...*

"It's partially due to her position," Sumia continued. "She's the princess of Ylisse. She feels responsible for protecting them, like a good leader should, but she's taken up that task all by herself. Ever since Chrom and I died in the future... Lucina has always felt alone. The other children may have lost their parents as well, but they were older than Lucina when it happened, and she was the only one with a little sibling to take care of. Without Chrom or me around, she had to grow up faster than any child should ever have to. She never wanted to lose anyone she loved again, so she took on the burden of keeping everyone else safe. But she couldn't. She just couldn't protect everyone herself..."

"It's an impossible task," Robin noted.

"But that's just it! That's one of the reasons that Lucina is so fascinated by you," Sumia exclaimed. "It's because you've *done* the impossible! You haven't let anyone die!"

"That isn't true..." he murmured solemnly. "I couldn't save Emmeryn..."

"That was beyond the scope of your control, Robin. You could have never foreseen those Risen soldiers. No one blames you for that." He didn't look convinced. "Tell me, Robin. How many Shepherds have we lost under your guidance?"

The man hesitated. "...None."

"Exactly. Of the group that your first responsibilities lie, you haven't lost a single soul. None of the children have had to lose either of their parents a second time. I can tell you with complete certainty that if it wasn't for you, at least half of us wouldn't be here by now," Sumia insisted. "And you don't just protect them because you need to. Not just because it's your job. You *want* to, just like Lucina does. You've kept all the people she cares about safe throughout this entire war, and I can't tell you how appreciative she is for that."

"But I didn't keep *anybody* safe in the future," Robin protested. "Even if Grima took control of my body, it was still *my* body. I'm still responsible for her future. I was the one who ruined her life in the first place! I just don't understand how she doesn't hate me for that, Sumia!"

"Well, what has Lucina said about it?"

"She says that she doesn't, but she should..."

"But she doesn't."

"But Sumia! She shouldn't!"

She took a firm hold of one of Robin's shoulders, repeating her response slowly and clearly. "But. She. Doesn't."

Robin opened his mouth to speak but couldn't find words to argue.

"Robin, you asked me why Lucina loves you, and I want to tell you something. Besides the fact that you keep us all safe and all of your positive traits like your kindness and intellect that she's drawn to. Lucina forced herself to become as serious as she is because it was the only way that she could cope with her losses in the future and lead the survivors of Grima's terror in the war for their freedom. But that was never the kind of person that she wanted to become, Robin, and you have to understand that about her! Lucina doesn't want to act serious all the time! She wants to have fun and do the things she likes and laugh with the people she loves. She represses her emotions out of a survival instinct that's been so difficult for her to break, and she never opens up to anybody because of this mask she feels like she needs to wear. But no one ever gets to see the real Lucina behind that mask, and I'll tell you the very same thing that I told her: as her mother I feared that she would never find someone to love in her life because she keeps her true inner self hidden."

"But that's why you're so special to her," Sumia smiled. "*You* awaken that other side, and it's all because you were the only one who's ever tried to find it. You wanted to help her, and you genuinely cared for her wellbeing, and it turns out that was all she really needed. Lucina feels comfortable around you, Robin. She doesn't think that she has to hide her feelings from you, so she can drop her defenses. You couldn't have known, but I could see the difference in her mood yesterday when she was with you in comparison to the past few weeks." She sniffled quietly, and then unexpectedly reached across the bed and pulled the man into an embrace.

"S...Sumia?!"

"Thank you, Robin... Thank you for making my daughter happy." Her voice quivered, but she was smiling wide. "I know this is a little awkward, but as her mother, I need to thank you." She gave him one last squeeze and released him from her grasp.

Robin was speechless, cheeks flush with color. Eventually he managed to choke out a few words in a very small voice. "I'm nervous, Sumia... A little while ago I was talking to Cynthia, and she grouped Lucina and I immediately in her speech. It was the first time I've ever heard someone else refer to us together as a pair so nonchalantly, and I don't know why it made me so afraid..." He glanced at the stain on his coat. "I...I don't deserve her, Sumia. I've done so much wrong to her it's unforgivable, in her world and this world. That night when I left, Lucina told me that I had broken her heart, a...and I thought I deserved to d...die for that..." he stammered, putting his face in his hands. "I want her to have the happiest life she can imagine but I'm afraid that Grima will find another way to control me. That time always favors its original course and I'll become his slave one way or another..."

"Were you not just listening to my whole speech?" Sumia sighed softly. "I'll ask you this question: what does Lucina always say that she wants?"

"She wants change..."

"Robin, you embody the change she wants. You showed her that she can change and be the person she's always wanted to be. You two have already changed at least one future, and that's why Morgan is here, and if you can change one then you can change another. I think it's about time that you started believing in that change yourself and prove to Lucina that no matter what you may have done in her future or others, this time it will turn out differently, okay?"

"Things will turn out differently..." Robin repeated, as if convincing himself that her statement was true. "I can try... No, I'm not going to try... I *will* change the future for her, and it's going to be one without Grima!"

"That's the Robin that she fell in love with," Sumia laughed, standing up and placing a friendly hand on his shoulder. "This war will be over soon, Robin. I know it's especially hard for you to cope with it, but we're so close. You'll feel so much better about yourself once we defeat Grima."

"Thanks, Sumia," Robin smiled despite his still somber-looking expression. "It means a lot... to help me with all this."

"Anytime. I may not be the smartest girl around, but I'll try as best I can to help if you need it. Maybe it's the mother in me that seems to be giving out useful advice. I mean, I'm not your mother obviously, but you know what I mean... Well, I should probably finish packing too. We have a long day ahead of us." Her tone of voice softened. "Everyone missed you while you were gone, Robin. We're glad you came back home."

"I missed you all too..." the man replied quietly, and glanced around the inside of the tent a few times. "I'll stay here and pack Morgan's things for her. I have a funny feeling that it will take her longer than she expects."

"Oh, I can help you if you'd like," Sumia offered. "We can finish faster if both of us work."

"No, you still need to pack your own belongings, and I'm going to say that Cynthia will probably ask you to help her too like she usually does."

"True... What did you say she was doing just now?"

"Something involving heroic plans with Owain."

"Once she gets wrapped up in any of that hero business that girl can lose track of time in the blink of an eye," she murmured. "I'll fetch her and get her ready. Are you sure you don't need any help?"

"I'll be fine."

"Okay then... See you later, Robin." Sumia waved goodbye and wandered out of the tent.

Robin remained sitting for a few minutes, allowing his eyes to wander aimlessly around the tent's interior. Both Morgan's sword and her Elfire tome were lying atop the small chest that she had been given to store her belongings; Robin stood and walked over, picking up the book. He could tell it was well used just from flipping through the pages, but she had taken care of it quite nicely.

I was the one who taught you magic, huh? Robin addressed the girl in his mind as if he was speaking to her directly. *Your old man started you off with fire magic...* He always used lightning magic, whether it be from a tome or channeled directly from a Levin Sword, so it was curious in a sense that he didn't teach her to use the same. He shrugged and placed the book back down. *She's doing well with it though. Maybe I'll try to teach her how to cast Arcfire. It would make her all the more deadly on the battlefield. And speaking of deadly...*

He lifted the girl's sheathed sword in both hands and pulled it from its scabbard, admiring the blade. *Lucina helped you pick this one out, didn't she? Your mother. Your mother picked this out for you.* Robin carved indistinct shapes in the air as he slowly waved the sword in front of him. *You're Lucina's daughter. And... And I'm your father. Lucina and I are your parents.* He held the sword motionless in mid-swing, repeating the phrase. *Lucina and I. Lucina and I parents.* A thin, almost giddy smile spread across his lips. *Lucina and I parents.* He liked the way it sounded.

Robin blushing a lot and getting all flustered whenever someone brings up his relationship with Lucina is very important to me, okay? And we got more of it since this chapter was more about him! Cynthia can *really* make a situation unknowingly awkward, can't she?

My major goal with this chapter was to show how Robin has really changed since he left many chapters ago. He's gone from being so confident and sure that things can change to really the opposite, and now he worries about everything he does because he doesn't want to mess anything up, which is why simply brushing Morgan's hair made him so anxious. Robin's afraid that he's done so much damage already having been Grima in the future, so he second guesses anything that could remotely do anyone physical or emotional harm. You could think about it in a

way that he has regressed into a more childlike state where he needs people to help him cope. Unlike before when he was Lucina's emotional support, he's become increasingly reliant on *her* for support himself. Kind of like a whole role reversal in a way!

We also get Sumia's opinion of why Lucina became so serious in the first place and how she doesn't want to be that way in reality. Her own happy side wants to be set free, and being with Robin brings out that aspect of her personality! Both Robin and Lucina are supporting each other in different ways now, which is even further strengthening their relationship!

Ugh, the opening scene with Robin sleep-talking was too cute to write... This ship is consuming my life...

Anyways, I'll try my best to get back on a regular schedule as soon as possible! I didn't like going for so long without being able to write the next chapter for you guys... All of my hard classes are practically done now with the exception of a few end of the year projects, so schoolwork for me should be relatively less from here on out until June when it's finally over for the summer, which means more story! Thanks again to all you loyal readers who stuck with me through this! Next chapter involves more Daddy-Daughter time!

Chapter 22: Storytellers

I'm back! Again!

Agh... I'm so late... So, so late... I'm sorry again... I severely underestimated how much time my end-of-school-year projects, final exams, me getting sick, and a summer internship would sap away from me, but all of those are done and over with!

And again, just to reassure you guys, I won't abandon this story! No way! I'm too far in to stop now! These past two chapters have just been difficult to get out with everything else I've had going on, but it will get much better from here now that I have much more free time on my hands!

Also as a sidenote, I changed the last chapter just a bit so that Morgan goes back to calling Sumia Grandmother instead of Auntie! I realized after reading it over again that Sumia would actually love to be called Grandmother, so I altered the chapter just a tad accordingly!

I hope you all enjoy this particularly long chapter!

In which Lucina gets a few more dating tips and Robin and Morgan have an epic battle

Chapter 22 – Storytellers

"Oh, come on! Why can't I tell him?"

"Severa, I've told you already! It's too embarrassing!"

"Why are you s...so insistent on this, Severa? Lucina doesn't want you to t...tell..."

Severa smirked, leaning back in the saddle of her horse and crossing her arms. "Lucina isn't the boss of me. I *could* tell him any time I wanted to."

"T...Technically, Lucina kind of is when you think about it..." Noire murmured, getting an annoyed look from the other girl. "She *is* the princess of the country we serve. I guess she could make us do w...whatever she wanted..."

"Of course!" Severa hollered, not making any conscious attempt to hide her sarcastic tone. "How could I *possibly* forget that our good old friend Lucina here is the perfect princess of the mighty Yisse? Oh, silly me! I'm but an inferior servant to the halidom! Inferior Severa, that's me!"

"Severa, not once have I ever treated you as my inferior," Lucina groaned, knowing exactly where the conversation was headed. *Why did Noire have to bring up me being a princess? Just the mention of it always makes Severa agitated...*

"The title of princess is just a consequence of my birth. It doesn't change the fact that we're equals. As your friend and not your superior, I'm just asking you to not tell Robin!"

"And what will ever happen to me if I *do* tell him, Your Majesty?" she snapped, knowing quite well that Lucina shared her father's dislike for formalities. "Will I be sentenced to ten years in the castle dungeon? Fifteen? Maybe for life! What an awful fate for someone as beautiful as I!" Severa struck her forehead with the back of her right hand and arched her head dramatically.

"You're starting to s...sound like Owain," Noire mumbled.

"Ugh! Don't even try to compare me to that joker," the other girl huffed, dropping her act and brushing some strands of hair from her pigtails off her face. "He can frolic all he pleases in his little fantasy land. I am personally trying to stay realistic."

"And me throwing you in some cold dungeon for the rest of your life is even remotely realistic?" Lucina raised her eyebrow.

"I was *exaggerating* for effect!" The girl frowned like it was obvious before changing the topic back, seemingly tired of the other two rebuking her. "Honestly though, Lucina," she sighed, shifting the reins of her horse to one hand so she could distractedly examine the current state of her nails on the other. "I don't get why you're so concerned about this. It's not like you were talking about him behind his back or cheating on him or anything. You literally don't want him to know that you think he's attractive. I would be doing you a *favor* by telling him."

"Severa, it's t...too embarrassing. *Epecially* if you tell him for me."

"But you'll never say anything!" Severa protested. "I know you, Lucina! You're so perfect that you never give out compliments to anyone. I could probably count the number of times I've heard you genuinely give a flattering remark to someone on one hand."

"T...That isn't true... Lucina has commented on my hair and outfit a few times," Noire interjected, giving Lucina a little smile of support.

"She probably said that she could have worn it better or something," Severa sulked.

Lucina decided to pretend like she didn't hear that last statement. A response would only send her off on another tangent. "Severa, please... It would be much better if I told him myself. They're my feelings, so if he should be hearing them from anyone, he should be hearing them from me."

The other girl pondered her response for a few moments. Lucina gave her a pleading look, and finally she conceded. "...Fine! I won't tell him."

"Thank you, Severa..." Lucina sighed in relief.

"I won't tell him..." the other girl repeated, putting one hand on her hip. "If you tell me what it is about him that you find so attractive. Deal?"

"Oh, I'm curious too!" Noire perked up and looked at Lucina eagerly. "E...Even though he's our tactician and everything, I don't really know much about him as a person to tell you the truth... H...He must be pretty special if you fell in love with him."

"What I find attractive about Robin? Robin is..." The question should have been easy. Lucina had so many reasons filling up her head, but when she opened her mouth to respond, she found herself hesitating. She knew what she wanted to say but she was unable to come up with the right way to convey them; all the words she conjured up just couldn't capture her feelings correctly. *Robin probably has a more dense vocabulary than I do. He could come up with something far more eloquent about me than I ever could about him... Gods, I'm going to botch this up...* "Robin is... so kind to me. He's sweet, and he's gentle, and he always checks with me first before we do anything just to make sure that I'm okay with it, even if we're just sitting down next to each other. And there's something about seeing him smile... I don't know what it is exactly, but seeing it just makes me feel... like things are going to turn out differently this time around." A mental image of the smiling face that he always seemed to reserve just for her came sharply into focus, and Lucina looked down at the ground as the corners of her own lips lifted. "I...I'm really not deserving of all the affection he gives me... I don't do enough for him..."

"I'm jealous, Lucina," Noire wondered. "It sounds like you've found the perfect guy for you. Your other half."

"My other half?" *Why didn't I think of that?*

Lucina waited for Severa to respond with a sharp comment or two, but the other girl was uncharacteristically quiet. She seemed to be thinking, as her brow was scrunched up just enough for faint lines of strain to be apparent on her face. Reaching up to scratch the corner of her lips, the girl silently mouthed something as if she was reasoning with herself.

"Severa? Was my answer satisfactory enough for you?" Lucina asked cautiously, slightly concerned with her friend's reaction.

"Hmm? Oh, umm, it was..." Severa snapped back to reality and looked pressed to think up of some kind of degrading reply. "It was... g...good. But... umm..." Her face showed an expression akin to sadness, longing even, before a smirk crawled unsteadily back onto her lips. "But... there *was* something missing... Something very important that you forgot, or maybe just chose not to add..."

"...Which would be?"

"Uh, duh! You didn't tell us how physically attractive you find the guy!" Severa complained. "It's essential knowledge for the friends of a girl in a relationship! Noire and I *must* know so we can rank him on a relative hotness scale. Don't we, Noire?"

Noire's cheeks turned a bright shade of rosy pink and her jaw dropped in embarrassment from being put on the spot. "W...What? I h...have no idea w...what you're talking about! What's a hotness s...scale?"

"A hotness scale is exactly what it sounds like, Noire," Severa explained matter-of-factly. "We're going to give Robin a number ranking on his relative attractiveness to girls from one to ten, with one being pretty darn unsightly and ten being a storybook prince of perfection. Let us begin, shall we?"

"I...I never agreed to this at all!" Lucina stammered, already half-recognizing that it was too late to stop her now.

"Hmm, let's see... You only mentioned that you liked his face just now, Lucina, or more specifically his smile," the other girl stated, as if she was presenting evidence in front of a judge. "What do you think, Noire?"

"Robin has a p...pretty handsome face I suppose..." Noire responded nervously, looking quite uncomfortable for having to be on Severa's side of this.

"...I can give you that," Severa nodded after a moment's consideration. "He does have a good looking face. But I'm afraid it stops there..."

"Stops?"

"Well, his facial features seem like the only things he's got going for him in the physical attractiveness race. I mean, he's the biggest bookworm I know after Laurent and his mother. He's got his nose buried in books all day and all night. What does he do in his free time? Probably studies some old dusty maps or something. I don't think I've ever seen him at the training grounds once, at least when I've been there." Severa scoffed in disapproval, frowning and shaking her head.

"Under that big coat of his he must be, you know, all... wimpy and weak. I'd give him... a three? Maybe a four, but that's pretty generous."

"Hey! He isn't..." Lucina began before immediately falling silent, remembering how Severa had gotten information out of her in the first place. The other girl was just trying to make her angry, and she wasn't about to fall into that trap again.

"Severa! Why do you always h...have to be so mean to Lucina and Robin? T...They haven't done anything bad to you! Can't you j...just be a nice friend and be happy for them for once?" Noire peeped.

"Oh, I am," the girl nodded. "But as Lucina's self-proclaimed best friend, it is my official duty to embarrass both her and her boyfriend until I get a boyfriend of my own."

"That d...doesn't sound very fair..."

"Not fair for me!" Severa huffed, growing upset. "Lucina has everything! She has a great relationship with her parents and pretty much the nicest guy on the continent as her boyfriend! And it doesn't help that they're so perfect for each other..." She crossed her arms and looked away so that Lucina couldn't see her face. "I...I could tell from yesterday... The way he looks at you, talks to you... That guy really, *really* loves you, Lucina. Heck, you even told him you were going to kill him and he's still infatuated with you! And Robin is like... probably an eight or a nine on the scale! I've gotta find all the minute imperfections you two have if I want to feel any better about myself..." She had been doing a masterful job at not showing it, but even Lucina was able to pick up on the subtle cracks forming in her voice. "I thought I was all set with this love stuff... I even read that stupid book that my mother carries around for tips... B...But guys don't like me because I'm m...mean and selfish..."

"Severa?" Lucina asked, voice soft. "Are you... crying?"

"I...I'm not crying!" Severa yelled, sharply turning to glare at her. The scowl she had on her face might have looked angry, but her eyes showed a very different emotion. "What would make you think that I'm even the t...tiniest bit upset about this whole debacle?"

"Okay..." Lucina sighed. "...But that wasn't true. What you said."

"What did I say?"

"That you're a mean person. I don't think that's true at all."

"L...Lucina is right, Severa!" Noire added. "Sure, you might act all m...mean and nasty sometimes, but I don't think that t...the real Severa is either of those things."

"I... don't know what you mean."

"If you really *were* a mean person, I...I don't think that Lucina or I would be such good friends with you like we are. We know who you are at heart but other guys don't, s...so they probably get a little turned off by your fault-finding crusades," Noire explained. "I...If you want someone to love you, y...you have to love them back and show it."

Lucina nodded and continued where her friend left off. "You're a very compassionate person, Severa. You just need a little attitude shift, that's all. If you tried being yourself for a change then guys will probably be tripping over themselves for you."

"R...Really?"

"Really. You have excellent tips," Lucina smiled. "If you hadn't told me not to miss my chance with Robin, I very well might have. I would have been too nervous to follow my heart and would have completely missed finding my other half, as Noire put it." She paused, waiting for a response that didn't come. "And maybe you just haven't found the right partner yet," she suggested. "I got lucky with Robin. There are thousands of other guys for you to choose from, and at least one of them *has* to be perfect for you."

Severa looked between the two of them, thin smile forming on her lips as she spoke. "T...Thanks, I guess. No... Not 'I guess.' Thanks. For everything, you guys... I don't get to tell you both how important our friendships mean to me, and it's time for me to say... thanks."

"Aww... Severa... Y...You're going to make me cry..." Noire stuttered, taken by surprise by her friend's comment.

"Maybe... I can take you two up on your advice for a change... And I really *am* happy, Lucina... for you and Robin." Severa turned to face Lucina directly, genuine smile on her face now. "Until I find a guy of my own, I wouldn't mind... helping you if you needed anything."

"Well, are there any tips that you have right now that you think will help?" Lucina offered, trying to extend her friend's better mood as long as possible.

"Let's see... Going back to the topic of his physical fitness, have you ever had him flex for you yet?"

"...Flex?"

"Yeah. You know... show off those muscles you said he has..." The girl held her arms up to demonstrate what she was talking about, seeing that Lucina was clueless on the matter.

"According to you he doesn't have any..." Lucina murmured. "And no. No I haven't."

"Umm, ignore my previous comment... Judging from how you're responding he obviously does. ...But come on! You've never asked him to *once*?"

"I could never do that..."

The smirk that appeared on Severa's face in response was her usual, but it seemed more mischievous than threatening. "But how did you happen to come by this information, hmm? You haven't seen him with his shirt off, have you Lucina?"

"N...no! T...The shirt that he wears under his coat doesn't have sleeves! That's all!" Lucina stuttered in reply, feeling her cheeks grow warm as she attempted to maintain her composure. "W...Why would I want to see Robin without a shirt on, m...may I ask?"

"First, I think the better question would be why *wouldn't* you? Second, it's all a psychology, Lucina," Severa explained. "Guys like it when girls, especially their significant other, comment on their masculinity. It's all in that book, you know. *How to Make Him Fall for You in a Fortnight?* That one I said my mother always reads?"

Lucina glanced around nervously to make sure Robin wasn't anywhere in earshot before replying. "A...And why exactly does the book say that?"

"It's pretty obvious actually when you think about it," Severa shrugged. "It's a guy thing. It reassures them that they're capable enough to protect their girlfriend or their wife from danger or other male suitors that they see as a threat to the stability of their relationship, I guess. Something along those lines was how the book put it. So Robin will probably like it if you tell him directly what it is you find attractive in him."

"But then that's going to make him feel like I only love him because of how he looks, not as a person..."

"Well, it doesn't *have* to just be that, and this was a pretty big thing in the book: you may not have thought about it like this, but we girls are attracted to strong guys."

Lucina opened her mouth to interject before Severa shushed her so she could continue. "But there are different definitions of strong. Tell me, Noire... What do *you* find attractive in a man?"

"W...What?! Uhh..." The girl turned deathly pale from being put on the spot so suddenly again. "I...I guess I would I...like a guy to be c...confident to make u...up for my lack of it..."

"See?" Severa gestured at Noire with her hand. "Confidence. Social strength. And what about you, Lucina?"

"I already told you... Robin is considerate and smart and..."

"Moral strength and intellectual strength," Severa nodded before Lucina could continue, having proved her point. "Guys like feeling strong, and they'll do anything to get stronger for the person they love! So! All you have to do is make some subtle remark about it, and whether he makes it obvious or not, I can almost guarantee you that he'll try to flaunt it just a little bit more for you. You tell him that you think he's caring and sweet? He'll be even more affectionate towards you. You tell him some other guy is trying to court you and is making you feel uncomfortable? He'll be absolutely sure to let that other guy know on the most hostile of terms. All of this, of course, works out to your advantage because *you* get pampered more."

"That seems a little selfish..."

"Hey! It's a win-win! Robin feels better about himself and you can get him to do whatever you want! I bet you nobody has ever commented on him being physically fit ever, so if you're the first to do so I bet he'll be lifting heavy objects left and right whenever you're around to maintain that image."

"But there's one glaring problem... Amongst the many that I have..." Lucina muttered. "There is absolutely no way I could ever say anything like that to him without dying of embarrassment first. It would be so much easier to comment on his personality rather than his looks... What in Naga's name would I say? Robin, can you take off your coat and lift some heavy crates for me?"

"I should do what now?"

"Wha?" Lucina turned around and felt drops of nervous sweat already accumulating on her forehead. "R...Robin!" Sure enough, the tactician was right behind her. Even on horseback she hadn't even heard him approach. Her eyes darted to her friends' faces for any kind of support, but she found none. Noire's face just paralleled her own horror and Severa looked ready to burst into laughter. "H...How much of t...that did y...you hear?"

"I was coming to ask you something and I heard my name," Robin replied innocently enough. "Was... there anything that I should have heard?"

"N...No! Nothing!"

Severa perked up, barely able to control herself. "Actually, Lucina wanted to ask you if you could take..."

"Some time off!" Lucina cried, interrupting her. "I wanted to ask you if you could take some time off!" she repeated, eying Severa threateningly.

Robin raised an eyebrow and gave her a confused look. "Time off? What do you mean?"

"W...Well, you're always working so hard and all with managing the entire army, so I j...just wanted to make sure you didn't have too much mental strain..."

"I'll be just fine. I have to make up for all the time that I've been away. I should be saying the same to you though, Lucina." He gave a warm smile as he spoke, seeming more confident in himself than he did last night. "You're always pushing yourself in battle and when you train. I don't want you to get hurt, okay?"

Relieved that the situation had been resolved, Lucina let out a deep sigh and smiled in return. "I won't. I promise."

"If anything I should be the one doubling my efforts. I need to figure out a way that we can beat Grima..."

"That shouldn't be too hard," Severa joked. "You can probably figure out exactly what Grima is thinking. I mean, you're him, aren't you?"

The color of Robin's face drained to a deathly pale at the comment, and all the confidence that he had probably spent quite a while building back up today was shattered in an instant.

Lucina recognized the look on his face from last night and was quick to try and divert his attention before what Severa had said could sink in. "You said you were going to ask me something, Robin! What was it?"

"I...I was just going to ask... if you wanted to take a walk with m...me for a little while... because I had a few other questions for you..." He looked down in shame and fiddled with a frayed end of his horse's saddle with his fingers.

"B...But you don't have to, if you don't want to... I'd understand..."

"I would love to. A walk sounds absolutely lovely," she replied, making sure to emphasize her eagerness while giving Severa a scolding look. The girl didn't seem to understand how delicate the matter was to him and that he had taken her joke to heart, so she just gave Lucina a shrug and a strange look back.

"If you say so..." Robin slowly slid off his horse, boots landing firmly on the ground and kicking up a small cloud of dust. Leading his horse closer to Lucina's, he offered up a hand for her to take. "Do you need any help getting down?"

"Thank you, Robin. I appreciate it," Lucina nodded and took his hand, allowing him to gently help her down even though she was capable of doing it herself. She watched him very carefully as he brought both their horses over to Stahl for him to watch over, mind racing to figure out how to bolster his confidence again. *Maybe Severa's strength advice could be put to the test...* As soon as Robin walked back over to her, Lucina seized his hand and led him to where they were far enough away from the rest of the army to speak in relative privacy but close enough so that they were in clear sight just in case anyone became concerned over where they had gone. Matching her stride with Robin's so that they were walking in sync, she initiated the conversation. "What did you want to ask me, Robin?"

"Nothing important, really..." the man replied hesitantly. "Just little things I was curious about..."

"Like what?"

"Well, for starters, what was I like in your future? B...before I became Grima... Do you remember anything at all about me?"

"What were you like?" Lucina repeated the question quietly to herself, searching the depths of her mind for an answer. She usually repressed the memories of her childhood. The pleasant times she had shared with her family and friends were too painful to relive after Grima took them away. "Let's see... The memories I have of you were from when I was a very young child. Gods, that seems like so long ago... I remember... you were very kind and helpful... And very handsome." That last part got a slight blush out of him, the exact response she was hoping for.

"Come on..." Robin smiled. "You're just making that up."

"Hey, it was true!" Lucina insisted, tugging on his arm. "I remember you being around Father *all* the time. You two were always talking, laughing, arguing... Everything you two usually do now."

"I guess there are some things that never change, no matter what timeline I'm in," the man chuckled. "Anything else?"

"The war kept me from seeing you two that often... I spent most of my time with the castle maids and nurses who were assigned to be my caretakers, but..."

"Let me guess," Robin interrupted her. "You were a little troublemaker, weren't you?"

"I... How did you know that?" she asked, rather surprised.

Robin laughed a little as he explained. "Chrom makes a messenger from Ylissol relay to him how you're doing from time to time so he knows that you're okay. The... little you, of course. It was actually Sumia's idea. Anyways, the news is always the same: Lucina doesn't want to do any of the princess training that her nurses are trying to make her do because she would much rather be running outside in the courtyard barefoot brandishing a toy wooden sword."

That was exactly what she liked to do as a child herself, but hearing it come out of Robin's mouth made her feel a little embarrassed about it. "Y...Yes, that was why... D...do you know what my father thinks about my, er, younger Lucina's... behavior?"

"He loves it," Robin replied. "Every time the messenger tells him what's happened, he bursts into laughter. That's my girl. It's his favorite thing to say. I guess he had the same general outlook on his political duties as a child as well."

"Oh, Father..." she sighed happily, mind wandering for a moment before snapping back to the previous topic. "...Oh, right! We were talking about you, weren't we? I'm sorry... I got a little distracted."

"W...We don't have to! We can talk about whatever you want!" he insisted.

"You wanted to know what I remembered about you. We don't *always* have to do what I want, Robin. That wouldn't be fair to you," Lucina smiled, swinging his arm.

"But I *like* doing what you want."

"Well, what if I want to do what *you* want to do?"

The man blinked a few times and shook his head, defeated smile on his lips. "...Fine, you got me. What else do you remember?"

"I was going to say that even though I only saw you a few times, you were one of my favorite people to be around. Father and Mother always had their exalt duties to attend to, so whenever they had an important meeting you would volunteer to keep watch over me."

"Did I? What did we do?"

"We read. Read a lot," Lucina recalled, fragments of memories slowly piecing together. "To be honest, I had never like reading that much before you started reading to me. Maybe it was because the books my nurses read to me were all about manners and how to be proper and dignified and such."

"That sounds like the boring thing to read about ever," Robin snorted.

"See? Exactly! You get it!" Lucina cried, holding out her free hand in front of her with her palm wide open. "But you made reading so much different! You would read to me about legends and myths and heroes! Of the Hero-King and the Radiant Hero and all of their extraordinary battles! I hardly knew what half of the words meant but I would pick up my little wooden sword sometimes and would act out the battle as you described it. Sometimes you would put down the book and pretend to be the villain for me to fight, even though you would always let me win. We even had a special little grove in the garden where we would always go. Oh, it was so exciting!" She squeezed Robin's hand tighter without realizing it as she started to remember more and more details, and she couldn't help but start giggling. "And then my nurses would come and try to drag me off to more boring lessons and we would hide from them for as long as we could because we wanted to keep reading. This one time we almost got caught with nowhere to go, and I hid right behind your legs and underneath the back of your coat. They didn't see me and left to look elsewhere, so we got a whole half hour more to read before they found us again!" She had to pause for a moment she was giggling so hard, and she had to put her free hand over her mouth to quiet herself. "I can't believe I forgot that! It was so fun! Thank you, Robin." Lucina stopped walking for a split second to stand up on her toes and kiss the man on the cheek.

Just like her comment about him being handsome, the kiss caught him a little off guard, but he was beaming afterwards. "I don't know if I deserved that kiss though," he told her. "I think it should have been meant for the Robin from your timeline. This Robin hasn't done anything like that for you..."

"Well this Robin has done a lot more for me than just reading," Lucina poked his chest with her finger. "And I never got the chance to thank you for it. You were one of the many Shepherds who disappeared with my father..."

"And became Grima..." Robin finished the last part of the statement that she didn't want to mention. "And ruined your world..." he added in a hushed tone. "What was your future like, Lucina?"

"My future? I thought you already knew that. It was..."

"No, I know what it was like in the general sense," the man interrupted her. "I meant what was a typical day like? What did you do every day?"

"Me? Gods, my routine is still so ingrained in my mind..." Lucina began. "I usually woke up before dawn while it was still dark. Well... I suppose light and dark were arbitrary... It was almost always dark with the cloud cover, and the only way you could tell that the sun was out was if you could see your own hands in front of you. Anyways, I would get up, patrol the camp once to make sure nothing had gotten past the night guards, and then I would train until the others woke up a little later. Food was scarce, especially as the years went by, so I generally skipped breakfast and went right to work. By then my usual day was pretty much the same: we would either help fortify whatever stronghold we were currently staying in or we would march across the land looking for food, water, and supplies. All the while fighting off hordes of Risen, of course. In the evenings, we would go through our rations and figure out how much every refugee could eat. I... would never eat my whole meal... I always gave at least half of mine to other orphans who were younger than I was, even if they were so sick that they had no chance of survival..." She scratched the back of her head with an almost apologetic look. "I couldn't help it, even if I was starving. I couldn't eat until they had... It probably wasn't very smart, I know."

"It was selfless and incredibly thoughtful," Robin told her quietly. "But you should have taken better care of yourself too, Lucina..."

"You know my... eating habits. After a while, I trained my body to go without food or run on minimal food for long stretches of time. I knew when I had to eat to survive. I'm okay, Robin," she smiled, hoping to reassure him.

"Yes, I *do* know of your eating habits and I also know that you don't take care of your own health as much as you should. I'm not questioning the fact that you can take care of your basic necessities because you're the most independent young

woman I know, but it still worries me, Lucina," he sighed, tugging on her arm and shortening the distance in between them. "Remind me to cook you a five-course meal when we return to Ylissstol, okay?"

"Okay," Lucina laughed softly. "I'll look forward to it. ...Oh! And as I was saying, in the evenings after we ate, we would... count and bury the dead, and then I would do a few more patrols around camp because I would volunteer to be on watch duty every night. Finally, I would go to bed late immediately afterwards. Then I would wake up early the next morning, and the whole process would repeat again and again."

"See? You don't get enough sleep either..." Robin added. "I'll make you sleep in every morning if I have to once this is over."

"You're good at that," she noted. "We probably overslept this morning."

Robin smiled at the mention of it. "Even my subconscious wants you to sleep in. If I hold you tight enough, then you can't escape me and get up out of bed, therefore forcing you to go back to sleep and get some much needed rest. A good tactician has a strategy for everything, even when said tactician is asleep."

"Does your subconscious include sleep-talking in its strategy, *love*?" Lucina smirked, making him blush intensely.

"S...Sorry about that..." He looked down at his feet with an embarrassed smile on his lips. "I didn't know that I sleep-talked..."

"Aww, don't be sorry about it. I actually liked it immensely."

"I guess my subconscious can't help it," the man joked. He checked to make sure no one else was watching them, and then quickly turned to give her a light kiss on the forehead. "Not when you're so darn cute."

"You're quite the charmer, aren't you?" Lucina giggled. "I have to say, not that I would have wanted it, but I was a little surprised that you didn't have a horde of girls surrounding you all the time before I fell in love with you."

"I think they all knew that my mind was set on only one girl in particular," Robin grinned. "A girl who I had made my mission to make happy. ...And that actually reminds me... I had one more question for you: what was your happiest memory?"

"Are we including the time I've spent with you, or before it?"

"How about everything that happened from when Grima awoke in your time to when you traveled to this time?" Robin suggested.

"Okay then... My happiest memory from the future... would probably have to be the time that my friends and I discovered that place... Yes, that's probably it," Lucina nodded, half talking to herself as she thought.

"What place?"

"I should explain a little thing first," she began. "Do you know why our food and water supplies were so scarce?"

"Hmm..." The man put a hand to his chin and considered the question for a moment. "I would assume that Grima and the Risen destroyed the crops, and perhaps did they find ways to dry up lakes and streams as well?"

"That *was* part of it, but do you know that smoke that Risen belch out of their mouths?"

"Of course."

"Well apparently something in that smoke contaminates the air, and because there were just so many Risen in my future, the air was thick with it. The crops needed fresh air as well as sun to grow, and without it they all withered and died... The stuff would even permeate our water supplies, all the lakes, rivers, and streams, polluting them and making them unsafe to drink from. Even the rain... The smoke mixed with the clouds and turned the rain foul as well. We were horribly dehydrated, but we had water everywhere we looked. We just couldn't drink from it unless we wanted to get sick," Lucina explained solemnly.

"That's terrible," Robin hissed with disgust. "It wasn't enough for Grima's servants to slaughter people directly... They were a walking poison..."

"Exactly," she nodded. "But that's what makes my memory such a positive one. So we had gone on another one of our little marches out from the stronghold to search for supplies, and we expected to find what we usually found: nothing. But

this time we decided to check a different place and go a little further than we usually went. It was risky, but people were starving... We had to do it. But we kept going, and in the middle of a grove of trees, there it was! It was a hidden spring with clear water, and there were even wild vegetables growing around it that could tolerate the low light! We didn't know how it was possible. Maybe the Risen hadn't been anywhere near that spot, or maybe the wind in the area kept the air relatively clean, but we didn't question it. Oh, it was wonderful!" Lucina beamed, reminiscing on all the emotions that had been running through her head years ago. "We all laughed, happy for the first time in ages. Brady cried joyous tears. Yarne was thrilled that some of the vegetables there included carrots. There was enough food and water there for everyone in the entire stronghold to have fresh food and drink every day for a week! A whole week! There weren't any groaning stomachs that night!"

Robin however didn't seem to share her excitement for the memory, and he stopped in his tracks. He was quiet until she had finished, and then he spoke in a low, sad voice. "Your happiest memory... of all... from that time... was having enough food to go around for j...just a few days? You're... absolutely sure nothing else t...trumps it?"

"Yes!" she replied enthusiastically, but her smile soon faded as she saw his reaction. "What's the matter, Robin? You look sad..."

"I...I'm sorry..." he sniffed, rubbing his nose with his free hand. "I...I knew your world was t...terrible, but I t...thought that you would at least have a few more b...better memories than that! I...I didn't know... Nothing even came close? Not... Not even your b...birthday? I thought... I thought..."

"It's okay, Robin... I'm okay..."

He didn't seem to hear her, and instead he pulled her into an embrace. "I'm... going to make up for everything, Lucina. Now I know better... The crimes I committed in your future..."

"Robin! Is that why you asked me all these things? So you could blame yourself even more for what happened?"

The man nodded. "I'll get stronger... I'll protect you from Grima... I promise..."

"They'll do anything to get stronger for the person they love..." Severa had been spot on. But if getting stronger for him meant destroying his own self-confidence in the process... Lucina grabbed on to both his arms and held him away just far enough so that she could see his face. "Robin, it's okay," she spoke definitively, looking directly into his eyes. "You don't have to become stronger for me... You're the strongest person I know."

He shook his head no and pulled her closer to him again. "You are the strong one, Lucina. I'm not strong enough. Not yet. I was weak in your future. I let Grima win."

"You already fought off Grima, Robin!" Lucina cried, reminding him once again. "The most powerful warriors I knew fell in an instant to his might! His ability to invade one's mind is more pronounced in you than in any other person, and you beat him all the same! No one has *ever* been able to do that! If that isn't strong, I don't know what is!" He didn't respond, so she softened her tone. "We'll get through this, Robin, and do you know how I know? It's because we'll do it together this time around. You make me forget about the past... and make me think of a *new* future. One where we'll be together, and that thought makes me so happy. I really believe that we can make that future happen, you and I. How about you?"

"There's nothing else that I would rather want."

"Then how about we talk about our happiest memories again, but this time include the time that we've spent together, hmm?"

A small smile crept its way back onto Robin's lips. "That shouldn't be too hard... Almost all of mine are with you."

"I think I can second that statement. How about you go first?" she offered, tugging at his arm to get him to start walking again.

"I'm not sure if I can choose to be honest... All of my time spent with you has been wonderful..." Robin spoke fondly. "But if I *had* to choose just one, I think it would have to be the first time we kissed. I remember every single detail of that night, and I'll never forget any of them. The glow of the evening sun... The cool, crisp air... The warmth of your lips against mine..." His eyes gazed into the distance and seemed a little glazed over even, as if remembering the time was drugging him with bliss. "Even the feel of your body... I had wanted to hold you in my arms for so long, and when I finally got that chance, it was everything I had ever hoped for..."

"Gods, yes..." Lucina sighed, resting her head on his shoulder as they walked. "I was so surprised... I never expected it to happen, and yet, somewhere deep down, I desperately wanted it to. I was also... really nervous... It was my first kiss..."

ever. But you were so confident..."

"Would it surprise you at all if I said that I was incredibly nervous too?" Robin asked. "I was honestly terrified that I was moving too fast, that you would reject me right then and there... It was... my first kiss as well. How do you think I did?"

"It was perfect, Robin. The kiss, the atmosphere... Oh, and those flowers, Robin! Those beautiful flowers! Everything! Just to know that there was a person out there who understood what I was feeling and that that very same person held feelings for me has to be one of the best feelings in the entire world. For me at least," she told him happily. "Now it's my turn! I'm going to say that my happiest time spent with you might even have been last night."

"Last night? Really? Even though Grima awoke?"

"I think so. You had been gone for weeks, and I missed you so much... But then you came back, and not even Grima could stop me from being overjoyed. And we just got to sit and talk together like we did before you left, with only the stars for company. The little things like those are some of the most important things in life to me... Father even said last night that he accepted us being together. And you always treat me like a princess."

"Maybe because you *are* a princess, Lucina," Robin laughed.

"You would treat me the exact same way even if I wasn't, silly."

"That's probably true, too."

"And being with you through the night was just a completely new experience for me. I'm... always haunted by my past, my future... Usually my worst memories keep resurfacing over and over so I can relive them every night, but I didn't get a single nightmare last night! Not one, and I know it's because you were there the whole time. I have nothing to fear when you're with me, Robin. You *already* protect me. I feel so safe when we're together..."

"That's the feeling I'm going for," the man grinned, unhooking their hands so he could reach behind her back and cradle her shoulder. "As long as you're safe, I'm doing my job."

"Then you're doing a very good job," she sighed. They were quiet for a few minutes afterwards, simply enjoying the other's company, before Lucina broke the silence. "Also, finding out I had a daughter deserves a notable mention. I wish you were there too..."

"Oh, right! I hadn't even asked about that yet!" Robin exclaimed, very interested. "What happened? Where did you find her?"

"We found Morgan in a place called the Ruins of Time."

"The Ruins of Time? I know that name... I read it in an old text once. Isn't it a shrine to Naga? If it's the same place I read about, the ancients would worship the Divine Dragon there. It was said to be one of her most important shrines, and it's existed for thousands of years. What were you doing there?"

"We went there searching for some artifact called Naga's Tear, but it wasn't there. We did find something much more important though," Lucina smiled. "I honestly thought she was you at first. You have the same outfit and everything, and she had the cowl of your coat up so I couldn't see her face. I saw her from a distance and she was being chased by a group of Risen, so I ran off by myself and followed her. Eventually I caught up and we destroyed the Risen together. When she first lowered her cowl, I'll admit I was a little devastated. Like I said, I thought she was you. I thought you had followed us and had come back for me... But once I saw my Brand and yours on her, I just knew she had to be ours. It took a little while getting used to being called "Mother" though, especially the first time... She even gave me a hug."

"The Lucina I know doesn't particularly like physical contact from strangers," Robin chuckled. "I'm surprised you didn't throw her off you."

"I considered it, but I didn't," she responded. "We talked for a little while, fought off a griffon rider, and then I had to explain her to my parents... and the rest of the army... That was... difficult to say the least. I suppose my father thought we had..."

"R...right... I s...suppose that it would m...make sense for Chrom to think that..." Robin stuttered, interrupting her to avoid the conversation entirely. "I'm sorry, Lucina... I should have been there to help you with that..."

"It's alright. We got through it and sorted it all out, eventually."

"Speaking of Morgan, I promised her that I would play a strategy game with her tonight and teach her a thing or two. You're welcome to join us if you'd like."

"I won't be able to play a strategy game of your caliber for the life of me, but I wouldn't miss it for anything," Lucina reassured him. "It will be the first time that all three of us will really be together as a family."

"As a family..." Robin repeated to himself, smile on his face.

"What was that?" she asked.

"Nothing... So tonight then at my tent?"

"Tonight."

Robin and Morgan had probably been expecting her for hours... Lucina grunted under her breath as she jogged through the camp, sheathed Falchion under one arm. Her father had asked her to help him take inventory of the convoy before they reached Mount Prism, which had kept her occupied for quite a while. She was fairly certain that he had asked her for help just because he wanted someone to talk to as he worked; Chrom hated being alone. She didn't have the heart to say no, so as soon as Chrom finally took the hint that she wanted to be somewhere else, which took far too long, Lucina left immediately for Robin's tent.

They might even be asleep by now... One strategy game can't take two hours... Lucina halted her run when she reached the tent and entered quietly even though the light was still on, just in case they had dozed off without snuffing it out. Inside, she found that neither was asleep, and in fact they were quite awake and hunched over a large table covered in little pieces similar to those used in chess. Robin had his trademark "deep thought" look on his face, and Morgan seemed to be imitating it.

"Sorry I'm late... My father kept me longer than expected..."

No reply. She blinked after a minute of simply standing and waiting for one. They were sitting right there, so there was no way they couldn't have heard her... She made another attempt, walking behind them and lightly brushing their shoulders with her fingertips. "Robin? Morgan? Are either of you in there?"

"Oh! Hello, Lucina," Robin responded distractedly, not looking up from the board.

"Hi Mother," Morgan responded in a similar fashion.

They fell silent immediately, examining the board in front of them with observant eyes. Robin's hand hovered over a few different pieces before he made up his mind and spoke out loud triumphantly. "So I would move my left flank here..." He used his forearm to sweep a few of his pieces forward, and Morgan's face turned slightly pale. "Which would cut off half of your remaining forces *and* sever your major supply line. This would put me in the optimal position to capture your commander, which would throw your army into disarray due to their lack of a leader, resulting in my victory." He moved one of his pieces across the board and dramatically knocked over Morgan's commanding officer.

"Oh, come on! Again?!" Morgan threw her hands up into the air and pouted. "How are you so good, Father? That's the fourth time you've beaten me! The fourth time!"

"You've played *four* games?" Lucina asked in shock. "Just tonight?"

"Yeah," Robin laughed as he started collecting the game pieces so he could clean them up. "Morgan wants to beat me so badly. But. She. Can't." He exaggerated the last three words, tousling the girl's hair playfully. "Don't be mad, kiddo. You'll beat your old man someday."

"I'm not mad at you! I could *never* be mad at you, Father! I'm mad at myself for losing again!" Morgan cried. "That's why I demand... another rematch!"

"*Another* rematch?" Robin looked surprised. "It's getting late, Morgan, and we've already played four games. Could we wait until tomorrow?"

"No way, Father!" Morgan was already rearranging her pieces on the board. "Because *this* time, I've got a strategy that's sure to win. It's my trump card! This is it! All or nothing! Unless, that is... You're not up to the challenge..." the girl smirked.

Robin stopped collecting his own pieces and raised an eyebrow. "You got me there, kiddo," he laughed. "A tactician never backs down from a good challenge, especially not me!"

"Well this is one challenge you'll lose, Father!" Morgan raised her voice, looking devilishly confident.

"Oh, it's on now!"

Lucina had to stifle a few giggles as the two furiously began arranging their own pieces for another game. She had never personally seen two tacticians of their talent face off, even if it was just in a game, and it was honestly a little funny to see how passionate both were getting.

"What do you think, Lucina? Care to watch me utterly annihilate our daughter in this epic yet simulated battle?"

"More like watch me throw the Shepherds' great tactician off his throne of victory!"

"I'm excited to watch," Lucina chuckled, sitting down cross-legged on Robin's bed and unsheathing Falchion, laying it square across her lap. "I'll watch you from here. Falchion has been looking a little dull as of recent, so I was going to fix that while you two play."

"Hmm? Am I hearing you right? I thought Falchion could never get dull," Robin asked as he carefully placed his last few pieces into position.

"Oh, it's still as sharp as it usually is," she explained as she pulled an old rag from one of her tiny belt pouches. "I meant dull as in dirty. The blade needs a good polishing."

"Ah," Robin nodded to show he understood.

Lucina stared at the blade for a moment before placing it on the bed beside her and standing up. "You know what? I'm actually going to change into my more comfortable nightclothes first. I didn't get the time to before I came here. Could you both wait just a few minutes before you start?"

"Sure thing, Lucina. We'll just finish setting up."

"I'll be right back! Don't start without me!" Lucina cried as she ran out of the tent.

"We won't, Mother!"

It took her a little longer than a few minutes to reach her tent, fully change out of her normal clothes and into her nightclothes, and then run all the way back than she expected, but true to their word Robin and Morgan held off on their game for her.

"I'm back..." she sighed, pushing aside the tent flap and sitting back down on the bed.

"Look at you in your cute little nightgown," Robin complimented. "I had almost forgotten how good you look in dresses. By the way, did you wear that dress I bought you back in Valm at all when I was away?"

Lucina blushed and pulled on one of the dress straps over her shoulder. "Of course not! I'm saving it for a special occasion..."

"Well, I can't wait until that occasion comes, whatever it may be. You look very pretty in it," he grinned as he turned his full attention to the game. "Alright Morgan, I'll pretend to be the enemy army this time. You're in charge of just the Shepherds' elite. That means each individual piece represents one of the Shepherds, including us, so you need to take into account our strengths and weaknesses this time, okay? Did you get all that?"

"Loud and clear, Father!" Morgan gave a quick salute and sat ready.

"Then let the battle... Begin!"

"I arrange my forces into an offensive wall formation!" Morgan shouted immediately.

"Already?" Robin looked a little caught off guard for a moment, but quickly regained his composure. "Then I divide my units up by their ability to attack either close or long range, but compress them into a more defensive stance."

Lucina shook her head with a smile and looked down at Falchion's blade to determine where it needed to be polished. The sword may have been divine in power, but like all other weapons it was still prone to getting dirty after numerous battles. Methodically she began to wipe down the blade with the rag she held, paying very close attention to every spot where the metal had temporarily lost its luster. Every once and a while she would peek up at her two tacticians and listen to them talking to each other. After the first couple of moves they had fallen silent for quite a long time until Morgan spoke in a tone that Lucina had never heard her use before.

"Ha! I've got you now!" The girl almost growled with eagerness, pushing a multitude of her pieces forward. "I'll crush your

primary attack force with my superior numbers!"

"Morgan..." Robin spoke softly, concern present in his voice. "That move leaves many of your units vulnerable, and many more could be killed in the fighting that would ensue if you moved them here... Are you sure you want to go through with it?"

"I won't fall for your tricks, Father! You're just saying that because you're afraid I'll beat you if I use this move! This will work!"

"Well, it might *work*, but..."

"Now I have the remnants of your army trapped in between these two mountain ranges! Nowhere to run..." Morgan interrupted him with a giddy grin on her face.

"Your right flank is exposed, Morgan," Robin reminded her quietly, but she paid him no mind as he knocked a few more of her pieces down with his.

"If I split my forces into a pincer formation..." the girl reasoned, surrounding the rest of Robin's pieces with hers. "I'll have blocked out all your escape options with the mountain range preventing a full retreat. Then I can assault the heart of your forces and destroy your commander! Which means the victory goes to... Morgan! Woohoo!" she whooped, knocking down Robin's commander and jumping up out of her seat in excitement. "Did you see *that*, Mother?! I beat him! I beat Father!"

"You beat him?" Lucina stopped polishing Falchion and placed the blade down into her lap, peering at the board in astonishment.

"I did it, Father! Aren't you proud of me? I really am a master tactician now!" She was so excited she clenched her hands into fists, and she eagerly awaited her father's response to her victory.

"I...I don't understand..." Robin muttered, staring at the board and running a hand through his hair.

"Are you too baffled by your first ever defeat at the hands of your own daughter that you can't even speak?" Morgan laughed.

"I... would have never taught you to use those kinds of strategies... It doesn't make sense..."

Morgan's grin withered away. "W...What do you mean, Father? A...Are you n...not proud of me?"

"No, it isn't that, Morgan..." Robin reassured her without taking his gaze from the board. "Come here." He motioned with his hands towards him. Morgan slowly walked over, eyeing his perplexed face. When she was close enough, Robin pointed towards the board to direct her attention. "The techniques you used... were effective, I'll admit, but they were also very violent and aggressive... See? Look at the number of troops you have left. Not that many, huh?"

Morgan shook her head after taking a long look at the rest of her pieces.

"You may have beaten me in *this* battle, but your maneuvers cost you two-thirds of your entire army. If you encountered another regiment of my forces in battle afterwards of the same size, you would never stand a chance. There are two questions you have to ask yourself: "How can I win this battle?" and "How can I do it in a way that would allow me to fight in another battle just as well?" It's a very important thing to think about when you're strategizing, Morgan."

"But you never said that, Father... It's just a game, isn't it? I just had to win the battle to beat you."

"And beat me you did," Robin gave a soft smile. "I was just concerned because I don't think in the future I would have taught you such an aggressive style. It's far too risky for my usual tastes, so I'm surprised I did." He gave the girl some time to think before adding another point. "And I don't know if you realized this or not... It was unintentional I'm sure, but that maneuver cost you me..." He righted one of Morgan's fallen pieces that was supposed to represent himself, and then picked up another. "And your mother."

"Y...You and Mom?" Morgan stammered, looking between the pieces in horror. "I...I didn't even notice that! I wasn't paying attention! C...Can I recall my last... um... five moves?"

"Sorry kiddo..."

"B...But it's just a game, Father!" Morgan took the two pieces meant to represent her parents from Robin's hands and delicately righted them on the board. "We can do it! Just put them back where they were and have a do-over!"

"But what happens if we use your same strategy in an actual battle and both your mother and I are lost? We can't recall those actions. This is war, Morgan. Every single action is potentially very costly, and it's our job as tacticians to both achieve victory and minimize the number of costs to our own army," Robin explained. "The Shepherds aren't just mindless pieces on a board that we can command and replace after every battle. Sure they might just be little pieces in our game right now, but how would you feel if the pieces you lost in this game were your mother, or your grandmother Sumia, or even Noire or Gaius? They're our friends and our family, and each and every one of their lives is very valuable. It's important that you understand that, Morgan."

"Your job is a lot harder than I thought, Father..." Morgan looked down at her feet in shame. "I guess I was getting frustrated because I couldn't beat you the right way. I don't feel like I won anymore... I still have a long way to go before I can beat you for real..."

"Hey..." Robin stood up and gave the girl a hug. "I'm very proud of you, kiddo. There isn't a single other tactician I know who could do the things you did in our first four games."

"R...Really, Father?"

"I won't lie. There were times where you almost could have had me. I had to use some fancy maneuvers to pull off a victory, and even though it may not have seemed like it, they were all very close games. Most of my knowledge comes with experience, kiddo. Something you don't have much of just yet. But you'll learn."

"How long will that take?" Morgan looked up innocently.

"You know, I'm not sure exactly how long it will take. There isn't a certain amount of time when I can say for sure that you're ready," he admitted. "But there is one thing I do know: with a little more experience under your belt, I'm going to feel sorry for any tactician who has to face you on the battlefield."

"Thanks Dad." Morgan sniffed and squeezed him tightly. "Sorry for accidentally letting you die in the game... Sorry about that too, Mother..."

"It's okay, sweetie," Lucina smiled warmly and picked up Falchion from her lap to continue polishing it. "It was an accident. Good thing it's only a game, right?"

"Right!"

"How about we clean up this game, kiddo?"

"Sure thing, Father!" Morgan nodded cheerfully and began to gather up all the game pieces into a pile. As they were finishing up, she took a few cursory glances at Lucina and leaned in closer to her father. "Pssst!" she whispered. "Father!"

Robin looked at her strangely. "Why are you whispering?" he asked in a low tone, unsure if there was any good reason for it.

"I have something for you!" Morgan glanced over at the bed one more time, and then held her arm out ever so slightly. From the oversize sleeve of her coat, the girl withdrew a small hairbrush like she was revealing a hidden weapon. Keeping the item concealed from her mother's view, Morgan smirked and made a quick head nod towards the bed.

Robin took one look at Lucina as well, then turned to his daughter. "Why are you hiding that hairbrush?"

"Duh! It's for you! Well, for Mother... But for you to use!" Morgan hissed under her breath. "Remember? Grandmother said that Mother likes getting her hair brushed, but she'll never ask you to do it!"

"...You sly little devil," the man smiled. "You're my kid alright. But... how long exactly have you had that under there?"

"You mean the hairbrush? All day," Morgan grinned and spoke as if the answer was simple. "I didn't know when the perfect opportunity would arise."

"Okay, then... I guess it doesn't hurt to be prepared..."

"Take it, Father!" Morgan pressed her sleeve up against Robin's, and since their coats were identical to each other, the sleeves matched up so perfectly that it was impossible to see the two exchanging the brush underneath. "I'll take away her sword and create a distraction for you, Father!" With that, she ran over and jumped onto Robin's bed right next to Lucina. "Mo-ther!" she sighed in a sing-song voice. "Can I please hold Falchion again? I want to show Father me using it!"

"Well, I don't see why not," Lucina shrugged, handing the sword to her. "But I don't think your father would appreciate you slicing anything in this tent in half..."

Morgan leapt up off the bed and struck Lucina's fighting stance. "It feels so cool to hold it, Mother!" she cried, drawing Lucina's attention.

"Just be careful with it, Morgan," she smiled and looked down at her hip as she stuffed the cleaning rag she had been using into a small pocket on her nightgown. As she was doing so, she was completely oblivious to the man sneaking up behind her.

"Hah!" Robin shouted, leaping up onto the bed much like Morgan had.

His shout must have put Lucina's survival instincts into high alert, for she flinched at the sound and immediately began to stand up. Both her particular sitting position and her uneven footing on the mattress however prevented her from standing as quickly as she could of, allowing Robin to grab both her shoulders and pull her back down.

"Gotcha!" he cried playfully, wrapping his arms around her chest.

"Robin!" Lucina shouted. She writhed in his grip and attempted to kick her legs, the instinct to escape captivity still overriding her reasoning. "What in Naga's name are you doing?!"

"Why, I'm going to brush your hair of course." The man revealed the hairbrush to her from the sleeve of his own coat and began to pull it through her flailing hair.

"Robin, please don't..." she begged, attempting to exploit the fact that he had let go of her with one of his arms to slide out of his grip.

Noticing her moving away, Robin extended both his legs and wrapped them around her lower waist. "You can't get away from me *that* easily!" he laughed, using his one arm that was still holding her to pull her back into his chest. "You're going to get your hair brushed whether you like it or not!"

"Ahh..." Lucina groaned, finding it pointless to struggle against Robin's surprisingly powerful grip on her. She relaxed somewhat and stopped thrashing as her instinct to survive subsided, but her muscles remained tense. "Morgan..." she pleaded, reaching out with her free arm towards her daughter. "Help me..."

The girl grinned and gave an exaggerated shrug. "Sorry, Mother! I can't help you this time!"

"Robin... Please let me go..." Lucina attempted to reason with him again.

"Lucina, you and I both know that if I let you go now, then you won't let me brush your hair, won't you?" he asked. "Just relax and enjoy it! I won't hurt you!"

"Father is very good at brushing hair, Mother!" Morgan chipped in. "He brushed mine this morning!"

"You were in on this weren't you, young lady?" Lucina asked.

"Yep!"

"That's not fair... Plotting with your father against your poor mother..."

"What an awful way to go!" Robin sighed exaggeratedly. "How terrible! Having your beautiful hair brushed by the man who loves you more than anything else in the entire world!"

"Fine... You win..." She pouted and slumped down. "Just don't pull any of it out..."

"Now why would I ever do that, hmm?" he asked, beginning to run the brush slowly and methodically through her long blue hair. After a minute of her not saying anything, Robin paused, worried that she was angry with him. "I just thought you would like this. If you really don't like it I can stop."

"No, don't stop!" she cried, suddenly very concerned.

"Oh, so you do enjoy getting your hair brushed, don't you?"

Lucina didn't respond, and instead she squirmed closer to him and craned her neck back just enough to be comfortable.

Robin burst into light-hearted laughter and continued tending to her hair. "You know I love you, don't you?"

"I know. But I like it when you remind me."

Morgan giggled and slid Falchion into its sheath before crawling up onto the foot of the bed. "Aww! You two are so cute when you're all lovey-dovey!"

"We aren't *that* lovey-dovey," Lucina protested.

"We kind of are," Robin corrected.

"Come on, Mother! You have such a happy face on right now!"

Lucina couldn't argue. She just shrugged and allowed her mind to drift peacefully. After a little while longer of brushing though, Robin unexpectedly tossed the hairbrush aside.

"What's the matter?" Lucina asked. "W...Why did you stop?"

"I can hardly do much more with it," Robin replied. "You have so many knots in all this pretty hair of yours, Lucina."

"Tending to my own hair is usually on the lower end of my priority list..."

"Don't worry. I'll get them for you," he reassured, combing through her hair with his fingers. He probably spent much more time than he should have on every single knot. She would have just cut them out, but Robin seemed determined to untangle each and every strand without cutting them at all. Every once and while, he would reach for a couple strands of hair that had drifted near her face. Whether he intended to do so or not, the former being the more likely option, Robin would brush against her cheek or her ear with his fingertips as he pulled away her hair. He was an expert at finding subtle things that she liked.

"You feeling alright, Lucina?" he asked after a while. "You seem like you're about to fall asleep."

"Hmm?" Lucina blinked rapidly to wake herself and squirmed into a more upright sitting position after noticing that she had slumped back considerably into him. "No... I'm fine..."

"You can fall asleep if you want. I'll carry you back to your tent."

"I...I'm awake. I'm not that tired just yet."

"Oh good!" Morgan chirped, holding her knees and rocking back and forth on the bed. "Can you tell me a bedtime story?"

"Aren't you a little old for bedtime stories, kiddo?"

"Hey! No one's ever too old for a bedtime story, Father!" the girl huffed.

"Alright then. What kind of story do you want?" Robin chuckled.

"I've been saving up some questions for when you got back so I could ask you two together," Morgan explained eagerly. "Like how did you and Mother first meet? Was it romantic? Was it love at first sight? I need to know all the details!"

"Umm... Yes and no, I suppose."

"Yes and no? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, when I first met your mother, she was disguised as a boy..."

"Really?" Morgan interrupted him. "Wow... Mother must have made a *really* good-looking boy for you to fall in love with her, Father!"

"Ha ha..." Robin faked a laugh. "This story is over."

"That isn't exactly what your father meant, Morgan..."

"I was just kidding, Father! I want to hear the story!" the girl begged.

Robin considered her plea, running his fingers through Lucina's hair a few more times so it looked like he wasn't interested. "Hmm... I don't know..."

"Fa-ther! Please, please, please tell me!"

"...I suppose I could continue... As long as you don't say anything like that again..."

"I won't! I promise!"

"Alright then. Where was I? ...So I first met your mother when she was disguised as a boy, the Hero-King Marth himself actually, and she wore a mask to hide her face. It was right when she came back from the future, so I saw her come through a portal in the sky and save your great-aunt Lissa from a Risen soldier. She helped us fight off the rest of the creatures, and then she disappeared with hardly a goodbye. The next time I saw her, it was when we were fighting against her in Arena Ferox."

"W...What? Why were you two fighting? I thought you were on the good side, Mother!" Morgan asked, shock on her face.

"It was more of a duel and not a fight," Lucina corrected. "I championed Khan Basilio because I wanted to look for the Gemstone in Ferox and make sure it was safe. I also wanted to see my father of this timeline's skills in battle to test myself to determine whether or not I was a match for him yet. I... wasn't. He bested me in a one-on-one duel."

"Right. And do you know what happened when she lost? She gets right up and leaves without a goodbye *again*!" Robin squished Lucina with his legs and put his chin on her shoulder. "Your mother is a sore loser."

"Hey! That's not very nice," she huffed, giving him a grumpy look. "I wanted to keep my identity hidden at all costs, so I wanted to spend as little time as possible with you all so you didn't suspect that I wasn't who I said I was."

"I know, I know. I was just joking, Lucina," he smiled.

"I don't see what's so funny about it..."

"So!" Robin raised his voice to get back to the story. "The *next* time I saw your mother was in Ylissstol, where she told us that your Grandfather's and the exalt Emmeryn's lives were in danger. When we asked her how she knew, she told us that she had seen the future. Now, this was all very mysterious, don't you think?"

Morgan nodded, completely enthralled by the story.

"And next thing we know, an assassin jumps out of a bush and lunges at Chrom, and your mother kills him right then and there!"

"Whoa! That's so cool, Mom!"

"Then a second assassin leaps out of a tree, and just as she goes to stop him, your clumsy mother slips on the other assassin's sword!"

Morgan gasped. "Did you get hurt, Mother?!"

"No, she didn't," Robin reassured her. "But the assassin *did* slice her mask right off her face. Chrom killed the assassin immediately before he could do anymore harm. It all happened incredibly quickly, but once we all recollected ourselves, I saw your mother's actual face for the first time. And let me tell you, Morgan: she was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. Well, I hadn't seen too many girls by that point, so there weren't many others to compare..."

"Robin!" Lucina scolded, very upset. "What do you mean by that?"

"I'm joking again, Lucina..." Robin laughed and kissed the top of her head. "You were the prettiest girl I had ever seen and you still are. No other girl comes even remotely close."

"Good," she relaxed, contented smile reforming on her lips.

"So I guess you could say that it was a little bit of love at first sight. First real sight," Robin smiled. "We had to defend the exalt from a whole group of assassins afterward, and I couldn't help but sneak a few glances at her when I could. She was an amazing swordswoman. Quick, graceful, and deadly. I still didn't even know what her real name was and I couldn't help feeling a little attracted to her."

"You were ignoring the assassins to sneak glances at me?" Lucina asked in surprise. "I didn't even notice... Shame on you, Robin! When Emmeryn's life was at stake!"

"I only snuck peaks at you fighting when the coast was clear," Robin cried. "And I think it was your fault, not mine!"

"How in Naga's name was it my fault?"

"Because how could I fight when you're so... distracting?"

Lucina couldn't help but be put in a good mood by his comment, and she reached up and squeezed his arm that was holding her. "I didn't think I was distracting..."

"Very distracting," the man smirked.

"So what happened after that?" Morgan asked after a moment. "Did you fall in love with Father right away too, Mother?"

"I'm... a little embarrassed now to say no... Not really..." Lucina sighed. "I didn't even know he held any feelings for me at all, and I didn't start to fall in love with him until later. Over two years later actually."

"Can you tell me that story?" Morgan asked, then let out a large yawn. "I...I can stay up for it!"

"Maybe that's a story for another day, sweetie."

"Your mother's right, kiddo. Time for bed."

"Aww... Okay..." the girl groaned, getting up off the bed. "Goodnight, Father. Goodnight, Mother. Thanks for the story."

Robin released Lucina from his grasp and slid off the bed with her following suit, and both leaned in to give the girl kisses on opposite cheeks at the same time.

"Goodnight, Morgan," Lucina smiled.

"Sweet dreams, kiddo," Robin nodded and messed with her hair again.

"I love you guys." Morgan laughed and gave them both a quick hug before walking outside. "See you tomorrow morning!"

Once she had left, Robin shook his head and sighed happily. "I've only known her for two days and I already love her to death. Having a kid is all that I thought it would be." He walked over and lightly draped his arms over Lucina from behind. "If I *had* to have a kid with anyone though, I couldn't be happier that it was with you."

"You know, you're awfully good at stealing words right out of my mouth."

Silence.

"Lucina?"

"Yes?"

"Umm... If you don't mind..." Robin began, somewhat uneasily. "Could... we sleep in the same bed again t...tonight? Last night was the best I've ever slept in... a long time."

"There you go stealing my words again," Lucina scolded playfully. "I... wanted to ask you the same thing."

Robin's smile grew wide. "Then we best get some sleep then!" He seized her tightly and leapt backward into his bed, taking her with him. "We should reach Mount Prism by tomorrow afternoon, so my princess needs some rest."

Lucina laughed and rolled off his chest, giving him time to take off his coat and boots like the night before. Robin stood up briefly to securely close the flap of his tent from the inside, and he snuffed the only lit candle in the room before sliding underneath the covers of his bed. Not wasting a single second, Lucina tucked herself right next to him and eagerly awaited the man to wrap his arms around her before relaxing.

"You know, Robin..." she spoke quietly into the darkness.

"Hmm?" Robin's voice replied.

"I haven't really thought of what would happen when we succeed and banish the Fell Dragon before."

"Is there anything that you want? I can try to make it happen."

"I'm not sure. Whatever happens, I'm eager to see how it turns out," she smiled. "I want you to surprise me."

Stop flirting, you two... It's too cute...

I wanted to give a whole bunch of little anecdotes in this chapter of their lives as well as continue where Daddy-Daughter time left off from the previous chapter! Plus we witness the resolution (at least for now) of Severa's issues with Robin and Lucina - she was just a bit jealous that they have such a strong relationship! Does anyone think that Lucina will ever be able to comment on Robin's attractiveness without first dying of embarrassment? I wonder... And Lucina finally gets her hair brushed, even though she gets a little stressed out about it at first - I imagine Lucina wouldn't like most surprises or sudden movements that much because they trigger her survival instincts that she needed in the future, and that's why she freaks out when Robin grabs her from behind. Robin cracks quite a few jokes as well, but unfortunately he can't seem to remember that Lucina doesn't particularly get most jokes either... Oh well...

Morgan-heavy chapter next! It won't take as long for me to finish as this one... I double promise! Especially because I'm so eager to write this next one! School is finally over for the summer for me, so now I can work on this story to my heart's content!

Chapter 23: Discovered by Time

Once again, I return with another chapter for you all! Sorry that this one wasn't out as quickly as I hoped (I really should stop making all these promises of fast chapters when I write slow...), but this one also turned out to be over twice as long as the previous longest chapter! Definitely the longest chapter of the whole story! Just one thing before you start reading -

This chapter is full of flashbacks, so to differentiate the flashbacks from what's going on in the present timeline, I've contained the flashbacks within a set of dots and a set of full lines...

...

Like this!

...

Fanfiction doesn't like it when I try to put in more spaces, dashed lines, or two sets of normal lines, so this was the best I could do. Basically, if a sentence is preceded or followed immediately by a full line you know the flashback has begun and ended respectively, and the dots indicate the opening and closing of the flashback as well and are always on the OUTSIDE of the lines. I'm sure you guys can figure it out from context as well - you're all smart people! Let me know if they're helpful! Now let's begin, shall we?

In which the sacred rite is performed and a twisted tale is unwound.

Chapter 23 – Discovered by Time

"Come on..." Lissa let out a loud groan. "Why does it seem like we always have to climb up something? Just looking at how high up the shrine is makes my legs hurt..."

"Our ancestors must have had a particular fondness for building all of their shrines on the highest mountaintops," her older brother joked, earning a frown from his sister. "But in all honesty, if I remember correctly the ancients believed that the closer their temples were to the sky, the closer they were to the gods."

"Hmph..." Lissa crossed her arms. "I'm sure a shrine to Naga would be just as effective if it was built at the *bottom* of the mountain... And much more accessible too."

"Chrom, I have bad news," Flavia spoke gravely as she walked up behind the man. "I'm afraid that we'll lose someone hiking up to the top."

"What do you mean, Flavia?" Chrom turned to face her with concern. "Who?"

"This mountain will just be too much for poor Basilio," the East Khan smiled and shook her head. "His back is sure to give out before we even reach the halfway point."

"What is this crazy woman talking about this time?" Basilio grunted, strolling next to Chrom.

"Oh, nothing," Flavia laughed. "I was just warning Chrom that you won't be able to haul your old bones up this mountain."

"Ha! I wouldn't worry about me! It's going to take a lot more than a mountain to stop the West Khan of Ferox!" The man slammed a fist to his chest and began to do some warm-up stretches to prove his point. "It's you we should all be worried about, Flavia! If anything, I'll be the one who has to carry *you* up. You could be much more productive staying down here and knitting tunics for us for when we come back!"

"Knitting tunics, hmm? Funny... That's just what I was about to suggest that you do," Flavia grinned. "I think you'd enjoy it quite a bit."

"The only thing I'd really enjoy right now is bringing down my axe on Grima's army!" Basilio swung his weapon through the air a few times before slinging it over his shoulder. "So enough talking and more walking! We'd better hurry if we want to reach the top before nightfall!"

The East Khan shook her head with a smile as the man began to press forward. "Maybe the old man has enough steam left in him after all. We agree on at least one thing though: I can't help but be eager to crack a few skulls myself. Make that

dastard Grima pay for all he's done."

"I think we're all looking forward to it," Chrom replied. "Finish off Grima, end the war, and return home. I wonder how my little Lucina is doing... I haven't had the time recently to receive a messenger from Ylissol..."

"She's probably causing trouble with the nurses again," Lissa giggled. "The news is always the same, Big Brother! She's just like you were when you were little."

"So all I did was cause trouble when I was a boy?"

"Duh! Of course you did! All you wanted to do was run around whacking things with a toy sword, and when our nurses told us you couldn't do that in the castle, you would get angry and have a temper tantrum. Only Emm could stop you once you started."

"I did *not* have temper tantrums..." Chrom huffed, looking a little embarrassed to be having this conversation. "And you weren't such an angel either! You would run around with me too..."

"Only because you made me! I missed out on so many etiquette classes because of you!"

"Don't tell me you actually *enjoyed* going to those!"

"...Well, no... But I probably would have turned out much more mature and ladylike if I went to more of them..."

"Hmm... Probably not," Chrom grinned.

"Hey! That's not nice!" Lissa gave her brother a slap on the arm and pouted. "I'll be the most ladylike lady the world has ever known! I just need more practice after we stop the apocalypse!"

Chrom laughed and flicked one of her pigtails with his finger. "We'll have to see about that then, won't we?"

"Yeah, *you'll* see all right! So let's go! Up to the top! We can't beat Grima if we don't make it there in time!" the girl urged, walking after Basilio with a skip her step. "Come on, people!"

"I thought your legs were hurting just thinking about it!" Chrom called.

"I'm beating you to the top!" Lissa ignored him and continued on her way.

Chrom sighed and shook his head. "Well, you heard her. Let's get going."

Flavia was quiet, appearing to be in thought, until a thin smirk emerged on her lips. "Temper tantrums, huh?"

"That was... a long time ago... A *very* long time ago..." the man's face turned slightly red.

"Our commander, exalt of Ylisse, pounding his fists on the floor because he doesn't want to listen. Now *that's* an amusing thought," the East Khan laughed.

"C...Could you try not to think about it, please?"

"I don't fully understand, Mother," Morgan wondered as they began to near the shrine. "Falchion is already super powerful. Can't Grima be injured by it already?"

"Well, yes, he can," Lucina explained. "Grima's physical form can technically be injured by any kind of weapon, but even if his body is destroyed, his spirit will remain in this world alive and well. Only the awakened Falchion can banish his spirit as well."

"Why can't we use your Falchion then?"

"I've actually wondered the same thing," Robin added. "Isn't your Falchion already awakened, Lucina? You had to perform the Awakening to return to this time, didn't you?"

"It's a little complicated..." Lucina unsheathed her own Falchion and held it in front of her, blade facing up. "I did have to perform the Awakening, but I couldn't complete the entire ritual."

"You didn't have enough time?"

"That wasn't all of it... The Awakening was incomplete because the Gemstone that Plegia guarded was lost to us. The Fire Emblem only had enough power for Naga to send my friends and I back in time. Some of my Falchion's former power was restored in the process, but without the last Gemstone it was impossible for us to defeat Grima."

Robin considered her explanation for a moment. "Well, don't take this the wrong way... I'm sorry you couldn't save your world, but I'm glad that you found ours. I would never have met you otherwise."

"Yeah! And I wouldn't even exist!" Morgan added. "Exist..." she repeated slowly, and then spoke in a quiet and unusually serious tone. "Mother? Will we... see Naga?"

"What do you mean, sweetie?"

"Like... Naga herself. Will we see her when Grandfather performs the Awakening?"

"I didn't see her personally," Lucina responded. "But Naga's power was much weaker in my time, and like I said before, I couldn't perform a complete Awakening either. Maybe we will see her this time."

"Why do you want to see her, kiddo?" Robin asked.

"I... just thought it would be pretty neat, I guess..." Morgan gave an uneasy smile. "You know... to see the real Naga and all..."

"Morgan..." Robin walked a little closer to her and bent down slightly as he walked so that he was closer to her height. "Is something the matter? You don't seem like yourself today..."

"I'm okay, Father. Really. I'm just... a bit tired after all the marching we've been doing," the girl reassured before her gaze drifted off distractedly towards the horizon.

"Okay, then..." Robin didn't sound convinced at all, but he rose to full height regardless and took a few steps towards Lucina to give the girl some space. After taking a few more looks at her, he leaned in to whisper in Lucina's ear with concern. "I've been worried that..." he began before he was interrupted by a shout from Lissa a little ways ahead.

"Ha! I told you, Big Brother! I just beat you to the top!" she cried victoriously despite the exhausted look on her face.

"You sure showed me," Chrom sighed, deciding to humor her as he walked to the bottom of the shrine's steps. "We made it, everyone," he spoke as he turned around to face the rest of the army. His declaration got a few tired cheers from the group. Chrom held the Fire Emblem, now adorned with its real Gemstones, in both hands, gazing it over carefully before looking up the steps and into the heart of the shrine. "It's time to see whether or not I'm worthy to wield a portion of the Divine Dragon's power..."

"Milord," Frederick hurried to his side and stood professionally, his sense of duty prevalent in his tone of voice. "Are you confident that you remember everything needed for the Awakening ritual? I took it upon myself to ingrain every step into my memory, so if you need brief instructions..."

"Thank you, Frederick, but I feel comfortable with my knowledge," Chrom assured. "This was one lesson from my training to become the exalt that I knew I could not miss."

The knight bowed and took one step backwards. "Very well, milord. I as well am confident in your abilities, but I will respectfully stand close by just in case you forget a step or two. And do not fear embarrassment in asking for a reminder," he smiled. "I will whisper anything you may forget in your ear as to not draw attention from the other Shepherds."

"Umm... T...Thank you again, Frederick..." Chrom looked behind him nervously before lowering his voice. "But I think everyone just heard you say that out loud..."

Frederick looked a bit confused for a moment over what Chrom was so worried about. "Oh my..." he bowed his head in shame. "I fear you may be right, milord... Should I ask each and every one of the Shepherds if they heard my suggestion just to confirm?"

"N...No! That... won't be necessary... I appreciate the offer, but I'm sure that I can do it by myself..."

"So should I stand with the others then? At a respectable distance?"

"Yes. That sounds perfect," Chrom nodded as the other man retreated backwards, relieved to have escaped even more personal embarrassment. Taking a deep breath to regain his composure, he put on a determined expression and

began to walk up the steps into the structure.

"Mother! Father! Let's hurry to catch up with Grandfather!" Morgan urged, pointing at Chrom.

"We're coming, Morgan. You don't have to shout," Lucina told her.

"But I want... need you two to be with me for this..." The girl looked back at them worriedly, as if they were going to abandon her there if she didn't do anything about it.

Robin shot Lucina another concerned look before replying. "We won't leave you, Morgan," he reassured the girl gently and offered his arm out for the girl to take. "How about you take us there then?"

Morgan glanced at her mother for confirmation. "Is... that okay, Mother?"

"Of course. Bring us where you want us to be." Lucina offered out her arm as well, which Morgan grabbed with her other hand.

With both her parents in tow, the girl weaved her way through the rest of the people ascending the stairs until they were directly behind Chrom. Now that they were at the front of the group, Morgan's grip relaxed somewhat, but she still kept a firm hold on them just to make sure that they didn't drift too far away in the crowd.

As she tried to ascertain exactly what was troubling her daughter, Lucina couldn't help but glance around the interior of the shrine in awe. It was much different than she remembered; the degraded, battle-damaged stronghold that she left behind was hardly comparable to the magnificent piece of architecture that she was stepping into. Their footsteps softly echoed around the massive room, and most of the army had fallen completely silent. It gave off an almost mythical feeling, not unlike the one that she felt in the Ruins of Time. *Maybe Morgan is acting so strangely because this place reminds her of the one where she was lost and lonely in...*

"Hello, friends," a calm, feminine voice sang through the silence.

"Who... said that?" Chrom asked, searching for the source of the voice until his gaze fell upon the far end of the room.

A figure was crouched in front of a statue portraying the Divine Dragon, and slowly she stood and turned to face them. "It is good to see you all unharmed," she spoke again. "It has been quite a while, hasn't it?"

"...Lady Tiki!" Chrom realized. "I thought you said that you were going to remain at the Divine Dragon Grounds to reclaim some of Naga's power... Why are you here?"

"Grave events, my friends..." Tiki sighed. "The Fell Dragon once again lives in his physical form in this world. Once I finished regaining the energy I lost during my sleep, Naga sent me here in anticipation that you would arrive. I've been speaking with her regarding our future course of action while we waited for you."

"How did you arrive here so quickly? As soon as Grima awoke we ourselves came here as fast as we could."

"I flew. I am a manakete, remember? Once Naga lent me her strength once again, I regained my ability to assume my dragon form. I travelled day and night without pause until I arrived."

"Did your trip run smoothly, Lady Tiki?" Lucina asked. "You didn't encounter any adversity on your way?"

"No, I was just fine. Thank you, Mar... I mean, Lucina..." Tiki took a long look at her and sighed. "I apologize. I should not have referred to you by the improper name again..."

"That's quite alright, milady," Lucina reassured. "I take no offense."

As Lucina spoke, Tiki's gaze fixated on Morgan intently. "Pardon me..." she began, voice slightly confused. "But who is this child by your side? I do not believe we have met..."

Morgan looked nervous as to how to address her. She had never heard Lucina using such formalities with another person before. "M...My name is Morgan..." she spoke, and then felt the need to add "Milady..." with a little bow.

"I sense... Naga's light within you, child..." The manakete closed her eyes and appeared to be concentrating. "You are... of the Exalted bloodline. You have the Mark of Naga, correct?"

"I...In my eye, milady," Morgan told her. "My right eye." She pointed at it with her left hand, unintentionally exposing the Mark of Grima on the back of it. Robin gave her a nervous look that she was quick to interpret, and she hid her hand quickly at her side.

"...But..." Tiki continued, eyes still closed. "There is another power as well... One far more dangerous. A darkness that drowns out the light... You contain..." She opened her eyes, giving the girl a confused look. "The spirit of Grima, as well... But how is that possible? The exalts have carried on the pure blood of Naga for hundreds and hundreds of years..."

Robin winced and looked at his feet in shame. The tiles of the floor were reflexive, so upon looking down he saw his own face staring back at him. He looked up immediately from his image and simply turned his gaze away.

"Is... this girl your younger sister, Lucina?" Tiki asked. "You spoke of having one..."

"No, milady... My sister is over there." She gestured through the crowd and Cynthia waved back. "Morgan is..."

"If she isn't your sister, then it is not your mother who possesses Grima's blood..." the manakete spoke quietly, half to Lucina and half to reason with her own self. "Then the girl is..."

"Morgan is my daughter, milady," Lucina informed. "I passed down the Brand to her."

"Your... daughter? But she is only a few years younger than you are. I thought you and your companions were the only ones to step foot into this present timeline."

"She must have arrived from the future as well, but I don't know how or from which time. She doesn't remember where she came from either... Her memory was lost when I found her."

"Hmm... Grima's spirit is strong in her, but... restrained... Something is holding it back."

"Holding it back?"

"Yes, but the blood of the Fell Dragon in her is not what I worry about most... Grima's presence is very powerful here, almost as if he was in this very shrine. It is..."

"Me, milady," Robin spoke up. "I remember you said back in Valm... that I had a power similar to yours. I... understand now. I am meant to be Grima's avatar, so the power I possess is not that of Naga's but of his. If my presence is troubling to you, I can wait outside..."

"You are Grima's vessel?"

Robin nodded.

"And yet you resisted his control?"

Robin hesitated, so Lucina immediately spoke up for him.

"Yes, milady. He did. Grima attempted numerous times to take over Robin's mind in the Dragon's Table, but Robin fought back and repelled him."

Robin gave her a thankful look for the explanation. "But the fraction of Grima's energy inside Morgan is... my fault as well. I'm her father..."

Tiki glanced between the three of them a few times. "Interesting," she said at last. "I have never met one with the influence of Grima so pronounced that has been able to resist him. Nor have I met one who possesses both the blood of Naga and Grima. Nor have I met one who has reasons to despise Grima so much and yet is willing to overlook her hatred out of love." An unexpected smile emerged on her lips. "What an interesting family indeed..."

"So... my presence here in this sacred place... doesn't bother you?" Robin asked after a moment's hesitation.

"You are not like the Grimleal. While you may have Grima's blood, you do not possess his traits nor the traits of his followers," Tiki explained. "Despite your heritage and intended destiny, you are still a follower of Naga." She paused, debating whether or not to continue with her next statement. "And... truthfully... you possess many qualities that Marth had as well."

"I'm sorry, milady, but you're mistaken. You must be referring to Lucina. I'm no hero..."

"You are very much like him," Tiki repeated. "I remember what he was like very clearly. You both have a gentle and kind demeanor, as well as the extraordinary ability to make friends wherever you travel. You also are willing to go to great lengths and endure personal struggles in order to protect your companions and loved ones."

"It's true, Robin," Chrom added. "Many of the Shepherds wouldn't be standing here today if it wasn't for you."

"Hmm... You are like Marth more than you realize," the manakete nodded. "But I have gotten sidetracked, haven't I? I apologize. We do not have much time to spare."

"Right. We need to perform the Awakening," Chrom agreed. "Will you help us, milady?"

"Yes. As her Voice, Naga sent me here as her means of communication with you for now. Until the rite is complete and her power has been brought back into this physical world, the Divine Dragon needs to speak to you through me," Tiki explained. "Now may you please ready the Fire Emblem at the altar, Chrom?"

The man nodded and proceeded forward alone, holding the Fire Emblem in his outstretched arms. Upon arriving at the far end of the room, he placed the artifact gently in a specialized indentation in the wall underneath the statue of the Divine Dragon. The statue seemed to develop a faint glow once the Emblem was secured, but it may have just been a trick of the light.

"Perfect. Now, if you would excuse me," Tiki asked, slipping past him. "I will summon Naga now. It will only take a moment."

"Of course," Chrom nodded, taking a few steps backwards.

She hunched down again in front of the statue, much like she had been when they first arrived. Bowing her head, she then began to speak under her breath in an ancient tongue. The very air around her began to distort, like the air over an intense fire. There was a brief flash of light, and Tiki stood, back still facing Chrom and the Shepherds. The upper torso of a shimmering figure began to materialize above the manakete's head, very slowly taking shape and becoming more clear. When Tiki turned around, her own eyes were glowing a faint blue and her movements were calm and fluid. The ghostly figure, now clearly recognizable as a woman, had a gentle face with the distinct ears of a manakete. Behind her, a few long pieces of fabric from her clothing flowed like ocean waves.

"Welcome, Awakener," she spoke in soft, echoing voice. "I am Naga, the Divine Dragon."

"Lady Naga..." Chrom acknowledged her immediately, collapsing to his knees to kneel. The rest of the Shepherds followed suit, and the entire shrine fell to a dead silence. "It is an honor to speak with you."

"You may rise, Awakener," Naga smiled. "As may your companions. I have been watching over you and your progress, and I applaud your noble efforts thus far. You all have come from many different places and backgrounds to unite against the forces of ruin and despair. Even some who have transcended the boundaries of time..." She turned her head to face one of the time travelers in particular. "Welcome to this holy place, Lucina, Exalted Warrior of the Future. I am pleased to see your journey through time was successful and you arrived here unharmed."

Lucina straightened her posture and folded her hands behind her back, becoming the picture of courtesy as she bowed her head. "I only arrived here safely due to your actions, Lady Naga. On the behalf of myself and my friends who traveled with me, I wish to give you the utmost thanks for giving us a second chance to make things right."

"You are kind and just, Exalted One," Naga responded. "I am proud that both you and your father continue my ancient bloodline."

"Milady," Lucina bowed again, this time with a faint but noticeably giddy smile.

"Now, Awakener..." The Divine Dragon shifted her gaze back towards Chrom. "It is time to complete the ritual. You have the sacred blade Falchion, correct?"

"Yes," Chrom nodded, unsheathing the sword and holding it tightly in front of him. "I am prepared."

"Then you may begin..."

The man took a deep breath as his muscles tensed, and then he spoke with a loud, confident voice the very words he had been taught to recite. "Hear me, Naga! I bear proof of our sacred covenant!" The Gemstones on the Fire Emblem began to glow and smoke with energy. "In the name of the exalted blood, I ask for the divine dragon's power!" The artifact started to shake, now hardly distinguishable in the blinding light it was emitting. "Baptize me in fire, that I may become your true son!"

With a deafening roar, the Fire Emblem emitted shockwaves of energy that burst through the shrine, and almost immediately Chrom was cloaked in a furious halo of blue flames.

"Hgh!" he grunted with strain as he bent over, body trembling slightly.

"Chrom!" Sumia cried nervously, one hand shielding her face from the light as her hair whipped around in the air from the shockwaves that continually pulsed out of the Fire Emblem.

"Father! Stay strong!" Lucina urged, clutching onto Robin's and Morgan's arms.

"I... I will prevail!" Chrom shouted, and with a tremendous amount of effort, he slowly began to rise from his hunched over position. Standing tall amidst the flames, he let out a triumphant shout and raised Falchion high into the air with one hand, blade pointed towards the heavens.

"Awakener! Your heart has been tested and deemed worthy!" Naga called, echoing voice booming over the roar of energy. Tiki walked forward and stopped as Naga's hovering image towered over Chrom. She reached out with her right hand, spectral fingers gracing Falchion's edge. "Cleansed in my fire, your desire has proven to burn the stronger!"

In response to her touch, Falchion began to shake in Chrom's hand, and at once the hole in its hilt ignited with a pale blue color. The flames that surrounded Chrom collapsed in on him, and the energy inside Falchion's core burst into countless beams of white light that pierced even the darkest shadows in the shrine. It was so bright that Lucina was forced to close her eyes, and she could feel Morgan's hands clutching her tunic and one of Robin's arms wrapping around her shoulders to brace her. And then, all at once, the sound stopped and the light subsided. Lucina gradually opened her eyes and allowed them to adjust. The flames had disappeared, and the Falchion that Chrom still held high in the air now radiated with power. The hole in its hilt shone a bright blue, and its blade now pulsed with a yellow-orange aura. Chrom lowered the sword down to eye level and gazed at it in awe.

"The Falchion's true power has been awakened," Naga spoke. "Once again it possesses its original strength from days long past."

"So now does it have the power to defeat Grima?" Chrom asked.

"That depends on what you choose to call defeat..." she responded. "Even the Falchion now cannot truly destroy him, for alas, Grima cannot be killed. It can however banish him into another extended slumber, much like the one that he most recently broke free off. This victory can only be achieved however if you fell Grima's body with the final blow. Otherwise his spirit will roam the land in search of a new host."

"But how long will this sleep last? If he broke free from it now, how much time do we have before he does so again?"

"This I do not know for certain," Naga sighed. "The seal will surely last past your lifetime however. It could persist for many decades, hundreds of years, or even a few thousands. All of these are very distinct possibilities."

"...So the best possible scenario is to cut Grima down with the Falchion and hope that his spirit lies dormant for at least a few millennia?"

"Correct. His sleep will be your victory," Naga nodded in agreement.

"Hmm... Where is Grima now?" Chrom spoke as he slid the gleaming Falchion into its sheath.

"West," Robin spoke suddenly, looking a little confused as to how he knew. "He's west of here."

"The Fellblood is correct," Naga elaborated. "Grima is located due west of this place, over an active volcano called Origin Peak. There he is absorbing ancient powers from the earth to restore himself to his full strength."

"Then we must move out immediately. We have to hurry if we want to arrive in time," Chrom stated, taking a step backwards.

"Origin Peak is much too far to march to by foot," the Divine Dragon sighed. "By the time you arrived, Grima's power will be fully restored. You will have the greatest chance of success if you strike him while he is still weak."

"How are we supposed to get there then? Have we already lost?"

"No. Victory is still possible. Even if you stay the night you will still have time to reach the Fell Dragon. His inability to merge with his avatar in this world..." She made a hand gesture towards Robin. "Has left him weaker now that he has to rely on his old body. This has forced him to take more time than usual to restore his strength. In addition, now that my power within Falchion has been brought back to this world, I myself am growing in strength. I can bring you there."

"You can? The whole army?" Chrom asked, shocked.

"Yes. But it will require a great deal of power for me to do so. I will muster my strength for the task."

"What should we do before then?"

"It would be wise of you to rest yourselves before your battle with Grima," Naga suggested. "I will be ready to teleport you to Origin Peak when the sun rises in the morning."

"Your offer is very generous, milady. I believe it would be in our best interest to take it," Chrom smiled. "May we set up a temporary camp just outside this shrine for the night?"

"Of course," Naga replied. "When you are prepared to fight the Fell Dragon, summon me again in the morning..." Her image flickered as her eyes closed, and she very slowly began to fade into small, shimmering lights.

"Naga!"

"Hmm? Yes?" Her figure rematerialized and she opened her eyes to glance towards the source of the voice.

"Wait! Please!" Morgan shouted. "Don't go yet!"

"Morgan!" Lucina cried, looking back at Naga with embarrassment. "Don't speak out of turn!" she whispered in the girl's ear.

"It is quite alright," the Divine Dragon spoke, overhearing her. "You may speak, child."

"I'm sorry, Naga... I didn't mean to interrupt you or anything..." Morgan prefaced. "But I have a really, *really* important question, and you're the only one who can answer it."

"Very well. I shall respond to the best of my ability."

"W...When we were at the Dragon's Table, and we saw Grima, he said that I was *his* daughter and his servant. He... he said that... that I killed my friends and family in the Shepherds for him..." the girl stammered, clearly upset at having to recall the words. "I c...can't remember any of my past, but now I have to know! Who am I, Naga? Where did I come from? Did Grima lie?"

This was why Morgan wanted to see Naga so badly... To ask about her past, Lucina realized.

"What Grima said..." Naga began, closing her eyes as she thought. "Was not wrong."

"B...But that's impossible! Morgan would never do those things!" both Robin and Lucina cried out almost in sync.

"However... not everything was entirely true either..."

"I... I don't understand..." Morgan said in shock. "What do you mean?"

The Divine Dragon let out a soft, echoing sigh before she spoke again. "Young child... The story of your past is known to me. I have been monitoring the particular future that you originated from very closely. I am also aware of the current state of your memories, and how your amnesia came to be..."

"How?! How did I lose my memories? Why do I not remember my mother?" the girl cried as soon as the topic was mentioned. "Did I hit my head when I came back into the past? Or did Grima steal them from me?"

"Your memories... are not lost... They are merely... locked away..." Naga explained. "Locked away by him." She slowly extended her arm through the air and pointed directly at Robin.

"M...Me? But... but why?" Robin stammered, taken completely off guard. "Why would I do such a thing to her? I don't even think that's physically possible for me to do!"

"Your memories were indeed locked away by your father..." Naga withdrew her hand and gazed at Morgan again. "You still possess them, but they lie in the deepest recesses of your mind where they are no longer easily accessible."

Robin opened his mouth to speak again, but Naga held her hand up to stop him.

"I can explain to you why..."

"Yes! Please! You have to tell me!" Morgan begged. "I need to know who I am!"

"But I must warn you... Your father locked your memories away for a very specific reason. The images I am about to show you may cause this seal to become undone... and some of the events of your past may bring you great sadness and

pain... Are you absolutely sure that you still wish to know?"

"Morgan..." Lucina spoke softly, placing her hand delicately on the girl's shoulder. "You don't have to do this if you don't want to... If the events of your past were painful, then your father must have repressed your memories because he wanted to spare you the suffering of having to relive them... My own memories of my past still haunt me to this very day, so maybe it's better not to remember some of them..."

Morgan looked at her with wide eyes, expression a mix of both nervousness and a bit of determination. She turned to her other side to glance at her father, who only could give her a defeated look back. She looked up at Naga, mouth opening and closing once in hesitation before making her decision. "Naga... No matter how painful the memories may be, I need to experience everything... I'll never be able to understand myself if I don't remember the world that I came from and the decisions I've made... I'm ready..."

"Very well," the Divine Dragon responded. "I shall show you all that I know of your past. Step forward, child."

Morgan did so, not stopping to take a look back at her parents. Her expression was determined, not showing any hint of fear now, and in that moment, she seemed more mature than Lucina had ever seen her. It was like watching her daughter leave her forever, because when she came back, she wouldn't be the same girl that she had known. Lucina took a desperate look at Robin, almost tempted to run up and grab the girl and take her back so she would be able to see her truly innocent smiling face for years to come. The man didn't take his eyes off Morgan, but the look on his face was a perfect reflection of Lucina's.

Morgan stopped in the very center of the room, far from where Lucina could reach, looking forward with an unwavering gaze at the altar in front of her. "I'm ready..." she repeated again.

"Then I shall begin," Naga spoke. "I must explain one thing first. When Lucina and her companions ventured into the past, they opened up hundreds of new timelines containing all the possibilities of their potential actions. The timeline you originate from, child, is one of these new timelines. It is a future where the events that occurred were very similar to the ones of ours with a few key differences. A world where everything seemed to take longer and where a split second changed the course of its very history..." Naga's apparition vanished but her voice still remained, and the scenery around all of them began to alter until it disappeared entirely. Suddenly they were in Ylissstol, and two fuzzy visions of figures appeared before them.

"After the war in Valm, the Shepherds returned triumphantly to Ylisse," Naga began. "A civil war had erupted in Plegia that the other nations of the country chose not to get involved in for the sake of the stability of their own states, so there was no messenger to intercept you in Port Ferox. Validar had to attend to the war between his own people, and his preparations for Grima's resurrection were not yet completed. Therefore, the halidom of Ylisse encountered a brief two years of peace. It was in this time that Robin and Lucina wed, and before long, Lucina bore a daughter."

The two figures that had materialized in front of them came more sharply into focus, and sure enough they were Robin and Lucina standing side by side with their backs turned. Lucina was holding a tightly wrapped bundle in her arms that Robin appeared to be speaking to, and even from behind it was clear that a pair of two, very small arms were poking out of the blankets and waving in the air.

"That's... me..." Morgan spoke quietly, reaching out with her hand as if she was about to touch the baby's fingertips, but she refrained and dropped her arm back to her side.

"Yes," Naga affirmed her statement. "They were very intent on starting a family together, and they held high hopes that the peace that resulted after the Valmese war would last for many years and that they could live a relatively calm life with their newborn child. Unfortunately, but a few short weeks after the child was born, the peace that they craved soon dissolved into conflict once more..."

The scene shifted to show Chrom in the throne room of Ylissstol with a toddler-aged Lucina by his leg. He was accompanied by both the older Cynthia and Sumia, who had another small child who looked about a year old over her shoulder. The light shade of blue hair and tiny pigtails made clear indicators that she was the much younger Cynthia of the current timeline.

...

"Chrom!" a gruff voice sounded from outside the throne room, and suddenly Basilio barged in, fully clad in armor and looking like he had just stepped off the battlefield.

"Basilio?" Chrom asked, looking rather confused. "What brings you here so urgently? Is something wrong?"

The older man opened his mouth to speak but was interrupted by a small voice.

"Hello, Mister Basilio!" the young Lucina smiled and waved at him with her tiny hand.

"Hey!" the man grinned and crouched down so he was closer to the girl's height. "How's my future champion-in-training doing?"

"I'm good, Mister Basilio!" Lucina giggled and rocked back and forth on the heels of her feet.

"Champion-in-training?" Chrom asked. "What are you trying to make my daughter do, Basilio?"

"Ha!" the older man laughed. "Lucina was my champion in Arena Ferox a few years back, remember? I'm going to need a new warrior pretty soon if I want to become the ruling Khan again!"

"Can I smash things like Daddy does?" the girl asked excitedly. "Daddy always breaks something when he practices." She brought her voice down to what must have seemed like a whisper to her, but it was still rather loud. "I know because he lets me watch! And Mommy always scolds him for it because she says it's dangerous for me to be so close! But don't tell Mommy, okay?"

Sumia sighed, clearly able to hear her. "Lucina, sweetie," she urged in a calm voice. "Come here."

Little Lucina scampered over to her mother and tugged on her skirt. "What is it, Mommy?"

Sumia bent down and adjusted baby Cynthia in her arms, leaning close to Lucina to whisper in her ear. "Let Daddy and Mister Basilio speak, please. This sounds important, so could you wait your turn?"

"Okay, Mommy!" Lucina nodded energetically and clamped her mouth shut, watching the two men with curious eyes.

"Right. Now where were we?" Chrom asked.

Basilio cleared his throat and spoke, voice very grave. "We have a problem, Chrom. A very big problem. As it turns out, our dear friend the Conqueror of Valm isn't worm food like we thought."

Chrom frowned. "What? But Walhart is dead! I cut him down myself!"

"Well apparently he just barely lived on, and these past two years he's been secretly rebuilding his army for another attack on the continent."

"Gods..." Chrom gritted his teeth. "Have they left their ports yet? If we hurry, we may be able to prevent them from ever getting out to sea. If they're already seaborne that poses a greater issue. We don't have enough ships left from Plegia to mount an aquatic attack... And I don't think the Valmese would fall for Robin's little fire-starting stunt again..."

"You won't need to worry about a battle at sea, Chrom..."

"They haven't left their ports yet? That's better news at least."

"That's not exactly the case..." Basilio growled. "They're already here."

Chrom's eyes went wide. "W...What?! On the continent?!"

"They slipped right by our scouts and invaded Port Ferox in the dead of night. The only good news I suppose is that their forces aren't as huge as they were before, but their men still rank in the thousands. Flavia and the rest of our army are keeping them at bay for now. Because she's apparently decided that I'm nothing but a lowly messenger, Flavia sent me to ask for your aid in repelling them."

"This couldn't have occurred at a worse time..." Chrom put a hand to his forehead as he took the information in. "All of the future children have been born in this timeline now... The Shepherds have young children to attend to..."

"A...And Lucy!" Cynthia stammered. "She just had baby Morgan a few weeks ago!"

"Damn..." Chrom hissed under his breath. "Robin and future Lucina are parents now too... But if this is Walhart we're up against, we'll need Robin to manage the army's strategy..."

"And you know Lucina, dear," Sumia reminded him grimly. "She won't just stay back while the Shepherds are fighting. It's not in her nature. Especially not if Robin is going as well..."

"Damn..." Chrom repeated, significantly louder this time.

"Chrom! Don't use such language in front of the children!" Sumia hissed, doing her best to cover little Cynthia's ears.

"Sorry..." he looked back at her apologetically. "But if both Robin and Lucina have to come, they won't be able to take Morgan with them, will they? It's going to kill them to leave her behind..." He shook his head angrily. "When I get my hands on that dast... I mean... bully Walhart..." he corrected, narrowly avoiding another scolding for foul language from his wife. "I'm going to personally ensure that he'll have no chance of stepping out of this war alive."

"Yeah!" Cynthia cried. "We'll make the evildoer pay for his wrongdoings twice!"

"B...But does that mean you're going to leave again, Father?" little Lucina asked in concern. "I don't want you and Mommy and my big sisters to go!"

"I'm afraid we may have to, sweetie..." Chrom knelt in front of his daughter. "But it shouldn't be for as long as it was before. And if we are going to be fighting on the continent, Mommy and I may be able to come back every now and again to see you. You'll just have to stay here with your nurses until we come back again, okay?"

"But I don't *like* my nurses..." the girl huffed, clenching her hands into angry little fists. "They never ever let me do any adventuring in the garden with my sword! They just wanna make me learn stuff all the time!"

"Would it make you feel better if I told them specifically to let you play outside?" Chrom asked with a smile. "If you're a good girl during your princess classes and do what the nurses tell you, I can make sure that they give you time to play in the garden afterwards."

The girl considered his offer for a while. "Maybe that will be okay..." she said at last. "But I'll still miss you, Daddy..."

"I'll miss you very much too, sweetie..." Chrom told her, pulling his daughter in for a hug. "But I'll come back very soon."

"Do you promise you will?"

"I promise."

"And... do you promise you'll be back soon too, Mommy?"

"Of course, love," Sumia knelt down as well so she could wrap her free arm around the girl. "I'll need you to help watch over your sister while we're away, alright? I'll be back before you know it."

"Okay... As long as you promise..."

"I'd better break the bad news to the Shepherds..." Chrom murmured as he stood up. "A lot of new mothers and fathers are not going to be happy with me tonight..."

...

The scene shifted to what appeared to be a living chamber inside the castle. It was rather modest in size, and there was a small cradle in the corner of the room near the bed. As more figures took shape, it became rather obvious whose room it was.

...

"I don't want to do this, Robin... I...I can't leave our baby here!" a very distressed Lucina paced the room, holding Morgan tightly in her arms. "I can't do this to her..."

"I know, love," Robin sighed and cocked his head. "It's not fair..."

"It's not fair!" Lucina repeated in agreement. "I don't want to leave her! I...I can't let the same thing happen to Morgan that happened to me... She's still far too young... If something happens to us on the battlefield... Morgan probably won't even remember her mother, or her father, or both even! What happens if she has to grow up without us?!" Lucina looked at the baby's tiny face staring back at her. "W...Without her parents?" she sniffed, sounding like she was about to cry.

"Lucina..." Robin spoke, opening his arms wide. Lucina slumped into them and sniffed again. "Don't cry... I don't like it when my beautiful wife cries," he smiled softly.

"I don't want to go, Robin... But we have to... We have to go..."

"Lucina..." he spoke her name again, stroking his hand through her hair to soothe her. "You and Morgan are more important to me than anything. If I have to take up my duty as a tactician again, I can assure you that my duty as a husband and as a father will always come first. I won't let anything happen to you or I. Morgan is going to say her first words and take her first steps with both of her parents right there with her. Both of us. That I can promise you right now." His voice was strong and confident. "And nothing will stop me from making that promise come true, because if it doesn't, I'll have failed as your husband and as Morgan's father. I'll make sure none of my strategies put either of us in danger. I'll... I'll stay up all night working on them if I have to. Anything for our baby girl."

"Then I'll stay up with you," Lucina spoke, managing to crack a small smile. "As long as we stay together and fight together, nothing can stop us."

"Absolutely nothing," Robin smiled in reassurance and kissed the top of her head. "We'll both come home from this war, and then we'll build that house that we've always wanted."

"With the flower garden?" she asked.

"The biggest flower garden in Ylisse," he replied. "And we'll live there for the rest of our days with our daughter, and no one will ever bother us."

"I'd like that," Lucina smiled. "Our perfect life together..."

As soon as she finished speaking, there was a knock at the door. "Excuse me," a woman's voice sounded from outside. "It's the nurse. I've come to take the young princess under my care."

"I'll be right there," Robin answered. He gave Lucina's shoulders a tight squeeze and walked over to the door to let the nurse in. She was older than Lucina was; she wasn't elderly, but she still had been through enough years to show the first, faintest signs of aging. Her face seemed kind enough, but there was something in her eyes that gave her an air of strictness as well. Robin could see Lucina shifting her weight from side to side uncomfortably as the nurse walked into the room.

"I am here to tend to the young princess now," the nurse repeated again and held her arms out. "You are due to leave soon, milady. It is alright. You can give her to me."

Lucina seemed to interpret the words "you can give her to me" as "I'm going to take her from you," a command rather than an offer, and she turned her body so that Morgan was out of the woman's reach.

"Milady? Is something wrong?" the nurse asked.

"...N...No... Nothing is w...wrong..." Lucina responded. "I...I..."

Robin walked back to her side and put a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

Lucina looked up at him sadly. "I... just wanted... to say goodbye to her... one last time... Do you want to say g...goodbye as well, Robin?"

"Here," Robin slipped his hands around the baby and took her up in his arms. "Morgan," he spoke her name, voice adopting the slightly higher pitch he used as his "baby voice". "Mor-gan," he repeated again to get her attention, and he smiled wide when the girl focused on him with her large brown eyes. "Hi, baby. How are you? Hmm?" His voice almost sang as he spoke. Baby Morgan reached out with a chubby hand and lightly touched her father's face with her tiny fingertips. "That's Daddy's nose, silly," Robin laughed, reaching up to hold her arm with his free hand as his tone became a little sadder. "Daddy has to go for a little while, baby. Daddy is sorry... He doesn't want to leave you, but he has to... But it's okay. Daddy will be back to see you soon. Very soon..." He stroked the top of her head a few times, brushing her wispy blue hair before kissing her on the forehead. "Daddy loves you, Morgan..." His eyelids fluttered for a moment, and taking a good long look at the child's face, he handed her back to her mother.

Lucina held her with both hands, raising her up so that they were at eye level. The baby became excited at the sight of her mother, kicking her little legs and reaching to touch Lucina's hair. Morgan was always enthralled by Lucina's hair and could play with it for hours on end. Robin would joke sometimes that even Morgan knew that her mother enjoyed getting her hair pampered. Lucina always assumed it was because she was fascinated by its bright color, even though she wasn't truly sure.

"...I think Daddy already said everything I was going to say, love," Lucina managed a thin smile. "Mommy will be back before you even r...realize she's gone, okay? She'll work extra hard so she can come back h...home..."

Morgan made a little grunting noise and looked at her strangely, as if she could sense her mother's sadness and was wondering what the matter was.

"M...Mommy will miss you more than anything else in the world..." Lucina stammered, squeezing her tightly to her chest. "Mommy loves you so, so much..." Like Robin had done, she gently kissed Morgan on the top of her head, and then she very slowly and reluctantly extended her arms out to give the baby to the nurse. She swallowed hard as soon as Morgan left her arms, and immediately she tugged on Robin's arm. "Robin, w...we have to go. I can't stay any longer or I'll..."

"Then come with me, love," Robin replied, guiding his arm around her as he started leading her out the door, mouthing a silent "thank you" to the nurse.

At that moment it seemed to dawn on the child that her parents were leaving her and that she was being held by a complete stranger. With as much strength as her infant limbs could manage, she pushed against the nurse and let out a few quick and high-pitched shouts to try and get her parents' attention. When her mother or father still didn't turn around, she started to wail loudly, trying to squirm out of the nurse's arms. Robin winced and Lucina froze in her tracks. Morgan's sobbing quickly turned into screams of distress. Lucina had never heard her scream like that before...

"I can't take it!" Lucina cried, breaking away from Robin and clearing the distance between herself and her baby in a fraction of a second. She snatched the sobbing child away from the nurse and clutched her to her chest, holding the back of the girl's head to her shoulder and rocking back and forth. "Shh... It's okay, Morgan... Don't cry..." The baby's screaming stopped almost immediately, but she still whimpered softly. "Mommy's here... Mommy has you..."

"Milady!" the nurse exclaimed, a little shocked that Lucina took Morgan from her. "I assure you that I am capable of caring for the young princess."

"I'm sure you're very c...capable..." Lucina replied. The baby in her arms let out a small yawn before going back to playing with her mother's hair. "But I just... want to put her down for her nap one last time. I...If that's alright..."

"Of course," the nurse nodded. "If that is what you desire, I will wait outside the door."

"I'll go with you," Robin offered, ushering the nurse outside. "I can tell you all of Morgan's likes and dislikes so it will be easier to tend to her..." He walked out as well and closed the door with him, poking his head back through to add "So Mommy can have her alone time with Baby."

Lucina smiled at him as he closed the door. Morgan made another little grunt and relaxed as the room fell quiet and dark.

"Do you want your blanket, baby?" Lucina whispered, walking over the cradle in the corner of the room. Taking care not to disturb her with any sudden movements, Lucina slowly reached inside the crib and pulled out a small blue blanket with the Brand on it that Sumia had knitted for Morgan when she was born. The baby eagerly took it and held it tightly next to her on her mother's shoulder.

Once she was settled, Lucina began to walk circles around the room, slightly swaying back and forth. She had already grown to be an expert at navigating the room in the dark and avoiding stubbed toes from the many naptimes and nights since she had Morgan. She began to hum a tune that her own mother had used to lull her to sleep when she was young. It was part of an older song, a sweet and soothing one that was more common amongst the commonfolk of Ylisse. The baby yawned again and slowly opened and closed her little hand around a couple strands of Lucina's hair, holding her blanket pressed up against her cheek with her other hand.

The tune usually put her right to sleep, and Lucina could feel the opening and closing of Morgan's hand slow until it came to a complete stop. She walked over to the cradle and swayed in place for another minute before gently placing the baby down on her stomach. Lucina then sat down in a small chair and slid her hand through one of the slits in the side of the crib to rub the girl's back. As she finished humming the song, she simply kept her hand still, feeling the rise and fall of Morgan's tiny breaths for what seemed to her like the very last time.

A thin line of light appeared on the wall, and Lucina turned to see Robin peering the room to check on her. She nodded to him, knowing that they had to leave. Her hand reluctantly slid off the baby's back and she stood, slipping out the door without looking back inside the crib. If she did she knew she couldn't leave her.

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"There you are," Robin smiled, pushing through the entrance flap of the tent he shared with his wife. "You just left dinner all of a sudden and I didn't know where you went."

Lucina didn't respond, making him frown.

"What's the matter, Lucina?" he asked softly, sitting down on the bed next to her. "Morgan again?"

"We're going to miss so many firsts, Robin..." she told him, voice quivering. "I w...was thinking about what you said the other day before we left... That we would both still be alive when Morgan has all of her firsts... And then... and then I just realized that even if we're alive, w...we're going to miss them... All of them, Robin! Everything happens the f...first few months! Her first word, her first steps... W...We won't be there..." Her whole body started shaking as she began to cry.

Robin wrapped her arms around her and pulled her close, but he couldn't come up with anything to say to soothe her. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that she wasn't wrong. They *were* going to miss so much... He couldn't get emotional... Lucina needed him to be strong...

"W...What if our baby's first word is nurse?!" Lucina thought in horror. "And n...not mama or dada like it should be! I...I hate this!" she sobbed into his shirt. "All I want is to l...live with you and our baby w...without any worries, but I can't because of this... this war! This s...stupid, damn war!" Lucina cried, filling with anger. "My w...whole damn life has been war! I don't want to f...fight anymore! I want to live!"

Robin was silent for a few moments, and then he stood up suddenly. "That's it."

"W...What?"

"I'm resigning from being the army's chief tactician right now," he declared. "And we are going to go back and we are going to raise our daughter her whole life and her first word is going to be mama or dada, damn it!" He put his finger down passionately, fire in his eyes as he began to march outside.

"You can't!" Lucina shouted, grabbing his arm. "My father needs you!"

"Yeah? He always needs me!" Robin shouted back, shaking off her hand. "I'm doing what *my* family needs! Chrom can get a new tactician!"

"Robin!" Lucina gasped. "You can't honestly believe that! This is Walhart we're up against! He'll destroy the halidom if you're not there coming up with another way to beat him again!"

"Chrom can figure it out. He's not stupid," the man responded. "He's a born leader. He'll know what to do. He's heard my usual strategies so many times that he knows how I think. He can manage the army without me. Without *us*!"

"No, Robin..." Lucina sighed. "This is... my fault... I'm being too emotional and I'm overreacting..."

"Lucina, you're not being too emotional!" Robin cried. "If anything, I'm not being emotional enough! Morgan is my child too, and I've been trying not to think about us having to leave her behind so I can focus on planning. Not anymore." He started pacing the inside of the tent anxiously, saying his thoughts out loud. "I just... I just can't see you like this anymore, Lucina! These past two years have been the best in my entire life! We got married. We had a baby. You've been happy, smiling, laughing... These past two days I haven't seen your beautiful smile *once*! You're so sad without Morgan, and I can't be happy unless you're happy! I can't see you like this anymore, Lucina! I can't..."

"Robin..."

He still seemed rather determined, but just before he could storm out of the tent, Chrom's urgent sounding voice could be heard faintly outside. "Lucina!" he called. "Robin! There's a messenger from Ylistol here for you! Where are you?"

"A messenger?" Lucina jumped up from the bed, immediately alert.

"Morgan," Robin glanced at her nervously.

"We're here, Father!" she shouted, flying out of the tent and running towards the sound of his voice with Robin trailing close behind.

Sure enough, Chrom was accompanied by a young man dressed as a squire. He looked tired and frazzled, like he had made the journey very quickly. "Lady Lucina! Sir Robin!" He bowed to each of them. "Troubling news I'm afraid from Castle Ylistol. Your child, the young princess Morgan, has been doing extremely poorly even in your very brief absence."

"Extremely poorly?" Lucina gasped. "What is it?! What's wrong with her?"

"She cannot be calmed, milady," the messenger explained. "Ever since you left she hasn't stopped crying. Numerous attempts have been made to distract her exactly as you suggested, but nothing has worked. Now ordinarily we would have waited a few more days to come to you to see if she simply needs more time to grow comfortable, but there is a more pressing concern that required your immediate attention."

Lucina's body went rigid. "More pressing?"

"Yes," he nodded. "She... refuses to feed. We have tried several different wet nurses, but your child refuses every one. She just pushes them away and wails..."

"Y... You mean... my baby hasn't eaten in two whole days?!"

"I'm afraid not. We at the castle are beginning to fear for her health at such an early stage in her development..."

That information put Lucina over the edge. "I have to go back... I have to go back now!"

"Milady," the man urged. "I'm sure you have many other pressing responsibilities! I was merely sent to request further advice from you on our next course of action, as the young princess seems to be very particular..."

"Other responsibilities?" she cried incredulously. "The health and safety of my baby are my most important responsibilities! Morgan needs me!"

"I'll arrange horses to leave right away," Robin spoke, voice thick with concern as well.

"If you need to go back, travelling by air will be the quickest route," Chrom suggested. "I'm sure Sumia and Cynthia will fly you both back to the castle if you need to check on her. They should be able to take you there and be able to catch up with us in less than a day."

"Then that's what we'll do," Robin nodded. "Are they both in the stables now?"

"I believe so," Chrom replied.

"Then we have to go!" Lucina urged, seizing Robin's arm and pulling him in the direction of the stables. "We shouldn't be long, Father!"

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"Where is she?" Lucina demanded one of the guards as soon as they arrived at the castle.

"Milady!" The guard looked startled at her arrival and hurriedly assumed a stiff and professional posture. "I was under the assumption that you had left with Lord Chrom to combat the Valmese invasion!"

"I was, but I had to come back because my baby is starving!" Lucina explained, already growing impatient. "What have the nurses done to her?"

"Umm... I believe that they put her down for a nap... Or at least attempted to..." the man responded, but Lucina was already running down the hall.

"Lucina!" Robin tried calling to her, looking exhausted from following her. "Please slow down..." He stopped to take a breath, apologized to the guard for his wife's urgency, and hurried off again to catch up.

Lucina came to the door of her room just as one of the nurses was about to enter. She could hear faint whining coming from the other side of the closed door.

"Lady Lucina!" the nurse immediately bowed. "The young princess has not gone down for her nap. I was just about to retrieve her to..."

Lucina didn't respond, slipping past her and opening the door. Even in the low light of the room, she could see Morgan's tiny form struggling helplessly in the crib; she was still too young to push herself upright.

"Morgan!" Lucina called from the doorway.

The child recognized the sound of her mother's voice and let out a whimper of distress.

"Oh, my poor baby..." Lucina walked over the crib and picked the girl up, cradling her gently in her arms. "Mommy's sorry... Mommy never should have left you... Mommy's so sorry..."

Morgan squirmed in her arms and continued to whine, looking at her mother with desperate eyes.

"You must be so hungry, baby..." Lucina told her as she started to undo the snaps of her tunic. "Shh... Mommy will feed you right now."

"Is she okay?" Robin asked as he walked inside.

"I think so," Lucina responded with a sigh of relief. "Just very hungry."

"Thank the gods..." the man murmured, beginning to close the door. "I'll give you some privacy."

"Thank you, love..."

Robin waited outside after the nurse left. After a good twenty minutes or so, Lucina stepped out as well with Morgan looking rather content on her shoulder.

"There she is," Robin smiled at the girl, holding out his arms as Lucina transferred the girl to him. "Come give Daddy a hug, Morgan." He held Morgan over his shoulder, softly patting her back. The girl soon made a little hiccupping noise, making Robin laugh. "There's the burp. Now you're happy, aren't you? ...Oh! And look at that, Morgan! Look!" He turned the girl around so she was facing forward and pointed at Lucina. "And there's Mommy's smile! Do you see that?" he asked. "Mommy has such a pretty smile, doesn't she? Mommy and Daddy were sad because we couldn't see you, but now we're happy!" He smiled and pointed to his lips to show her. "See?"

Morgan listened to him carefully, and then she reached out with one finger and poked Lucina's lips.

"Right! You're so smart!" Robin bounced her in his arms. "So smart!"

The girl's rosy cheeks lit up as she made a toothless smile of her own and gurgled.

"And so cute! You're as cute as your mommy," Robin laughed, giving both of them a kiss. "Oh gods... I didn't even realize how much I really missed her these past two days... But speaking of that, Lucina... What in Naga's name are we going to do with her? We can't just leave her here by herself again..."

"I'm going to have to stay back with her, Robin..." Lucina reasoned after a moment. "I won't be able to go with you..."

"But Lucina! The army needs you! You're one of, if not *the*, best swordfighter after Chrom!"

"No... They don't, Robin..." she realized. "I've... done my part, I suppose... I warned my father of the future, and I hardly succeeded in that even with Emmeryn's death... To be honest, he doesn't absolutely *need* me anymore... Plenty of the other Shepherds are excellent with the blade as well. I'm sure... you can find someone to replace me with."

"Lucina, you're not just an excellent swordswoman. You're the biggest inspiration for all of your friends, just like Chrom is for the Shepherds of this timeline. I don't know if you notice, but they look up to you like an older sister, and I'm not just referring to Cynthia. All of them. Owain, Severa, Nah, Brady... Your strength and motivation becomes theirs," Robin explained before putting on an expression of self-pity. "And I'll be terribly lonely without my daughter *and* my wife..."

"But Robin, we have no other choice... I have to stay with her. I'm the only one here who can feed her if she doesn't like any of the nurses. And you have to go back to my father. If the Shepherds fall to Walhart because you weren't there to provide guidance, then all of our efforts will have been for naught..." Lucina hesitated. "But I can't just back down now... What kind of warrior would I be if I stay back while my friends and family fight to preserve our very world? I just can't be a warrior and a mother at the same time..."

Robin was quiet for a moment, considering her statement as he rubbed Morgan's back. "You can..." he said at last. "We do have another option. We can take Morgan with us."

"Robin! We can't bring Morgan into an active war zone!"

"Why can't we? Sure it may be a little risky, but we'll both be there with her, and it's not like she's ever going to be on an *actual* battlefield," he explained. "Morgan will stay with us in our tent normally, and when we have to fight, she'll stay with

Lissa and the other healers in the medical tent. It's far enough away from combat that she'll be perfectly safe, especially when she's surrounded by people whose job it is to protect the lives of others. That way Morgan will be happy because she can eat, you'll be happy because she'll be with us all the time, and I'll be happy because both of you are happy. Plus we won't miss any of those firsts like you were concerned about, and she'll never have to see another nurse again."

"I... might like that actually..." Lucina rethought. "I *would* feel much less anxious if she was with us and not so far away... And both of us would still be able to fight alongside our companions. What do you think, Morgan?"

The girl gazed at her with her big brown eyes that always melted Lucina's heart, resting her head on Robin's shoulder affectionately.

"I think that she'll like coming with us judging from those screams we heard out of her when we tried to leave," Robin laughed, looking down at the girl. "You didn't want Mommy and Daddy to leave, didn't you? You were not happy with us."

"...Are you sure she'll be safe during battles?" Lucina asked.

"If you'd like, I can assign more guards around the medical tent. I *can* exploit my powers as a tactician a little bit," Robin smirked.

"One of the benefits of having a tactician husband," Lucina chuckled. "I think that's our best option then. As long as my father is okay with it."

"I don't see why he wouldn't. I mean, Morgan *is* his granddaughter. And if he says no I can always threaten my resignation."

"Oh gods, don't scare me with that again... And isn't that considered blackmail?"

"I was just joking, Lucina," he laughed. "He'll be fine."

"I hope so," she smiled, growing excited as she rushed back into the room. "I'll go pack her things then!"

"How do you like that, kiddo? We're going on a big family trip..." Robin told her, and then he paused to smell the air. "...Right after your diaper gets changed..." he murmured as his nose scrunched up. "Umm, Lucina! Be sure to bring some extra diapers too!"

"I'm packing a whole bag!" she called back.

"Geez..." he looked down at Morgan jokingly as he walked inside their room. "I know you're excited, kiddo, but you don't have to do it in your pants... C'mon. Let's get you cleaned up."

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"...So we took Morgan with us," Lucina spoke out loud as the images around them faded for a moment.

"Correct," Naga nodded. "She was an incredibly attached child even from her very young age. Being separated from her parents was devastating. Their absence put her into such a sadness that she became unable to eat or drink until they returned. This dependence slightly improved with age; however, it still remained ever prevalent."

"Mama..." Morgan spoke quietly, not directing the word at anyone in particular.

"...Morgan?" Lucina asked, a little confused.

"My first word..." Morgan responded without turning around, staring off into space blankly. "I...I remember... my first word was... mama."

"You... remember?"

The girl held her head in one hand. "I... remember?" she asked herself in surprise. "I...I don't know how..."

"Ah," Naga spoke. "Already the child's memories are unlocking."

"Do you... remember anything else?" Robin hesitantly asked.

"N...No... Not yet... Just that my first word was mama..."

Lucina was silent for a minute, waiting to see if Morgan had anything else to say before speaking herself. "What does this have to do with Grima though, Naga?"

"These images, or memories, are naught but a prelude," the Divine Dragon explained. "It is important to understand the child's personality and traits in order to fully comprehend her story. Is it alright for me to continue?"

"Yes, of course," Lucina responded. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Very well," Naga spoke as various images and scenes began to appear in front of them. "The campaign that ensued as the halidom of Ylisse along with their Feroxi and Chon'sin allies attempted to repel the Valmese invaders took a few years to complete. Despite their major losses and their Conqueror's wounds, the Valmese had already controlled a large portion of territory in West Ferox by the time the Shepherds arrived. Even Plegia was forced to unite and join Ylisse temporarily to fight back."

"Because Walhart only had his eyes on Plegia," Chrom spoke.

"Correct. Though Walhart's drive for conquest compelled him to rule every land he crossed, his initial goal was to remove the Plegian monarchy and turn the people away from Grima."

"Why?" Lissa asked. "Was Walhart your follower too?"

"No," Naga sighed. "Walhart did not follow me either. He believed in the ability of the individual to pursue greater strength, not in finding strength from worship. As to why he sought to destroy Grima, I know not. Perhaps he saw the Fell Dragon as a threat to his own power. To return to the story, it was this period of invasion that Morgan grew up in. Her parents soon found that her dependency on them did result in excellent obedience as well as extraordinary learning capabilities that far surpassed other children of her age. From the moment she could talk and stand on her own two feet, she possessed the overwhelming desire to learn as much as she could from them. She still however remained playful and childish, traits that her parents treasured in her as well."

The images around them came into focus, and they revealed several different scenes from Morgan's early years during the war.

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"Daddy!" a toddler-aged Morgan called. "Look at me, Daddy!"

"What's up, kiddo?" Robin asked with a smile as he followed her. The army was marching again to intercept the Valmese at a key mountain pass that would be pivotal to change the tide of the war. The girl had been walking with him, but she had slipped out of his hand and run a short ways away, stopping at the side of the road.

"I can jump over this puddle, Daddy!" the girl spoke with great excitement, pointing at the smallest patch of water on the ground.

"Whoa... That puddle is really big, kiddo..." he spoke with an exaggeratedly grave tone. "I don't think you can do it."

"No, Daddy! I can!" Morgan insisted. "I can!"

"Hmm... I'm not sure..." The man pretended to be thinking hard about it, but even he couldn't hold up the act for long, allowing a smile to slip past. "I think you're going to have to show me before I believe you."

"Okay!" the girl exclaimed, running over to the edge of the puddle and squatting low to the ground. "Watch, Daddy! Watch!"

"I'm watching," Robin chuckled.

Morgan eyed the tiny puddle intensely as she began to swing her arms back and forth to build up momentum. She waited a few moments as she did so, possibly to build up suspense, and then with a grunt she released all her energy and leapt into the air, just clearing the puddle. Her face lit up. "Did you see me, Daddy? I did it!"

"Wow! That was pretty amazing," Robin told her. "Can you jump over *that* puddle now?" he asked, gesturing towards a slightly larger one.

"I can do it!" Morgan insisted, running over. She repeated her same preparations, and took another jump. "See, Daddy? I did it too!"

"You must be the very best jumper in all of Ylisse," Robin smiled, not mentioning that the back of the girl's right foot had hit the water when she landed. "I bet you can jump over *anything* you wanted!"

"I jumped over that puddle, and then that puddle..." the girl spoke as she pointed with her tiny finger. "So now I'm going to jump over Daddy!"

"Well that sounds like quite a large leap, both literally and metaphorically," the man murmured half to himself. He crouched down as low as he could to the ground so that he was almost sitting. "But let's see you try."

"I'm going to do the *biggest* jump ever, Daddy!" Morgan raised her hands high into the air and stretched. "Ready?"

"Ready."

"Then I'm going to do it!" As she had done twice before, she bent her knees and swung her arms, finally leaping at Robin with the most power she could manage.

Knowing that she wouldn't make it, Robin reached out and grabbed her underneath her arms in mid-air, hoisting her up over his head and placing her down on the ground behind him.

Morgan gasped, hands covering her mouth in excitement. "Daddy, I did it! I jumped over you!"

"You did, didn't you?" Robin smiled as he turned around.

"I want to do it again!" she cried. "Here I come, Daddy!" She leapt at him again, but this time Robin grabbed her around the waist and slung her over his shoulder as he stood up so that she was dangling upside down.

"Ah! I'm upside down, Daddy!" Morgan laughed, blue hair swinging wildly.

"Yep! I got you know!" the man smirked as he hurried to catch up with the rest of the army. He adjusted his grip so that both his hands held her legs right below the knees.

"You're silly, Daddy!" The girl could barely speak she was laughing so hard.

Robin could only laugh with her as he jogged up to Lucina, who had been watching them cautiously.

"What is your silly daddy doing to you now, baby?" Lucina asked, smile on her face.

"Look, Mommy!" Morgan giggled. "I'm upside down!"

"Just be careful, Robin," Lucina noted, ever the protective mother. "Don't drop her."

"Aw, she's fine. Here," Robin offered, suddenly bending forward at his waist. Morgan was flipped forwards as well, and due to the way he was holding her as he stood upright, she was now right side up and sitting on his shoulders. "How that for safer?"

"I'm taller than you are now, Mommy!" Morgan exclaimed, wrapping her little arms around Robin's forehead.

"You can't get too tall, baby! You have to stay Mommy's little girl forever," Lucina smiled.

"That's okay, Mommy. I'm not *really* taller than you," the girl explained seriously as if Lucina didn't understand. "I'm just on Daddy's head!"

"Oh, good!" Lucina exclaimed in mock relief, as if the girl had just revealed something groundbreaking.

They walked for another minute. Morgan was seemingly content with playing with her father's silver hair for those few short moments, grabbing it or brushing it with the open palm of her hand. Eventually, keeping one hand wrapped tightly around Robin, she leaned to the side and reached out to touch Lucina's head. "Mommy," she spoke to get her attention. "Can I touch your tiara? It's pretty!"

"Do you want to wear it for a little while?" Lucina asked, reaching up to dislodge it from her hair.

"Really?" Morgan opened her mouth wide in shock, covering it with her hand. "I can wear it?"

"Of course," Lucina laughed, reaching up on the tips of her toes to place the tiara on top of Morgan's head.

The girl touched it carefully with her fingertips in awe. "I look like Mommy now! Look, Daddy! I have Mommy's princess

tiara!"

"Well I can't miss this, now can I?" Robin asked out loud, lowering her down in front of him. "Oh my goodness!" he spoke with a dropped jaw for effect. "You're right! You look just like Mommy!"

"Yeah!" she cried, reaching out to take both of her parents' hands as they walked so that she was in between them. "I wanna be just like Mommy when I grow up!"

"Aw, what about Daddy?" Robin asked.

"I wanna be like Daddy too!" Morgan exclaimed. "Both! A princess like Mommy and a ta... A tact... How do you say it, Daddy?"

"Tactician," Robin reminded, pronouncing each syllable of the word slowly.

"Right! And a tactician like Daddy! A princess tactician!"

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"Mommy," Morgan tugged on Lucina's arm during down time in camp. "What is Auntie Cynthia doing?" She pointed a little ways away where Cynthia was striking some heroic poses.

"Um, I'm not really sure, baby," Lucina frowned as she looked at her younger sister. "Auntie Cynthia does some funny things sometimes."

"Can we go see, Mommy?" the girl asked, putting on a sweet face. "Please? Pretty please?"

Lucina couldn't say no to those pleading eyes. "I suppose we could. As long as we don't bother her with... whatever she's doing."

"Yay!" Morgan held her mother's wrist tightly and started running in her aunt's direction, dragging Lucina along with her. "Auntie! Auntie Cynthia!" she called when they were closer.

Cynthia froze mid-pose and turned around, big grin on her face. "Hey, Morgan! Hey, Lucy! What's up?"

Morgan let go of Lucina's wrist and folded her hands behind her back innocently. "What are you doing, Auntie Cynthia?"

"I was practicing!"

"For what?"

"Only for the most heroic of handshakes!" Cynthia exclaimed. "It's like saying hi, but with super cool poses. Like... this!" She struck another pose, standing on one leg and holding her hands in some kind of formation above her head. "See? Only true heroes use the one and only hero handshake to greet each other!"

"Can you teach me, Auntie?" Morgan asked excitedly. "I want to do it too!"

"Sure thing! Anything for my coolest niece!" Cynthia clapped her hands together, obviously thrilled that someone wanted to learn from her. "Especially when it comes to the way of the hero! So first, just stand normal like I'm doing," she spoke, standing still.

"Okay!" Morgan nodded, standing in front of and facing her.

"Careful, Lucy," Cynthia warned. "It may be too much on your eyes to experience the raw power of two heroic individuals performing the hero handshake from such close range. I'd advise taking a few steps back."

"Cynthia, I'm sure I'll be fine."

"Oh, right!" Cynthia realized at once. "I almost forgot for a second. You have the Brand in your eye! You'll be fine then. I gotcha, Sis." She grinned, pointing at Lucina with both index fingers.

Lucina rolled her eyes. "This will be interesting to say the least."

"Ready, Morgan?"

"Ready, Auntie!"

"Alright! All you have to do is copy what I do and pretty soon you'll be greeting people heroically in no time!" Cynthia took a deep breath in, and then placed one hand on top of the other, pointed her overlapping arms diagonally at the sky, widened her stance, and bent one knee, all the while uttering some kind of dramatic shout. "Can you do that, Morgan?"

"I think so..." Morgan took a few careful looks at Cynthia, and then repeated her actions almost perfectly, final pose a mirror of her aunt's.

"Wow! That was great!" Cynthia applauded. "Ready for the next one?" She bent her other knee as well and crossed her arms in front of her so that her hands framed her head on both sides.

As she had done before, Morgan copied Cynthia's pose almost effortlessly.

"Geez, you're good!" Cynthia laughed. "I suppose you're naturally gifted in the hero arts, being the daughter of two heroic people and all. When you're a little bit older you might just have what it takes to become a fellow Justice Cabal member!"

"Really?" Morgan asked, even though she had no clue what the Justice Cabal was.

"You bet! But we'll have to keep working on our hero handshake. There are even more moves you've gotta do!"

"Can we do them now?"

"There's always time for hero training in my book!"

"Yay!" Morgan clapped and then paused, trying to put on a more serious face even though it just made her look cuter.

"But... I just have to ask Mommy first, Auntie. She always says, 'You have to ask Mommy or Daddy first before you do something, Morgan.' Okay?" The girl then turned around, ran up to her mother so close that she was practically standing in between her legs, and asked as if Lucina hadn't heard a word of the girl's previous conversation. "Mommy? Can I keep playing with Auntie for a little bit more? Please?"

"Sure, love," Lucina replied, stroking her hair. "Good job remembering to ask."

"Thank you, Mommy!" Morgan grinned and hugged her mother's leg tightly. "I love you!"

"I love you so, so much, Morgan," Lucina smiled, giving the girl a tiny hug back before she broke away to run back in front of Cynthia.

"I can play more, Auntie!"

"Awesome!" Cynthia gave a thumbs up. "You ready for the next one?"

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"Father!" Morgan cried. She looked slightly older than she was in the past two memories, maybe by a few months to a year.

"Yes, kiddo?" Robin asked without turning to face her, looking preoccupied with strategies for an upcoming battle.

"Can we practice how to use magic today?" the girl asked, looking down at the particularly heavy Thunder tome she held clutched to her chest with both hands. "You said you were going to teach me how."

"Um... Maybe tomorrow, kiddo... I've still got a lot of work to do..." Robin sighed tiredly, tracing some lines with his finger onto the map he was leaning over.

"Aw... B...But you promised we could do it today, Father..." Morgan whimpered. "I've been waiting a...all day..."

Robin paused in his work, looking down at his daughter. "...You're right," he murmured. "I *did* promise you. I suppose it won't hurt to put off my work for a little bit longer if it means I get some more time to spend with my baby girl."

"R...Really? You're the bestest, Father!" Morgan smiled excitedly. "I got the Thunder tome from the chest, just like you said to use!"

"Great! That's all we'll need," Robin smiled, stepping away from his desk. "We should probably practice over by the training grounds though. I don't think your mother will like it too much if we broke anything in here. Come on," he urged, stepping outside of the tent.

"I'm coming, Father! Wait for me!" Morgan called, slowly making her way out as she hauled the heavy tome along with her.

"Here," Robin held his hand out. "That looks a little heavy for you. Do you want me to carry it there?"

"Yes, please..." Morgan held out the tome thankfully, allowing Robin to take it. "Can you hold my hand too, Father?" she asked innocently.

"Of course, kiddo," Robin offered out his other hand for his daughter to take, and he allowed her to lead him all the way there. Once they had arrived, he found a quiet, grassy spot behind the weapons tent and sat down cross-legged on the ground. "You can sit too, Morgan," he told her.

She plopped down right next to him, shuffling close and doing her best to imitate her father's sitting pose as much as she could. "Why are we sitting, Father?"

"I don't know," Robin shrugged. "We don't have to, but I thought it would be easiest to sit instead of stand at first. This way we can open up our tome without having to carry it." He placed the Thunder tome down in front of them and flipped it open to an untouched page. "I've never really taught anyone how to use magic before..." He scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I don't really remember how I learned either, but I'll do my best to explain."

Morgan looked at him eagerly, beyond thrilled to be learning something new.

"Okay, so," Robin began, pointing at the open tome. "Do you see all these symbols? They look like little pictures, but they're all letters."

"But... they don't look like the letters I know..."

"No, they don't," the man nodded. "They're symbols that we don't use anymore. Only people from a long, long time ago used them. The only other thing that's different is that you read these letters backwards."

Morgan cocked her head and looked at Robin strangely. "Why?"

"I'm not sure exactly... It's just the way people used to write, I suppose..." Robin explained. "But when you change all the symbols to letters and read them backwards, you get a couple of words in the ancient language. There are only two real steps to casting magic. The first step is to say these words."

"But that's so hard!" the girl cried. "I'm not big enough yet to read all my words in my normal books..."

"That's okay," Robin smiled encouragingly. "All you need to do is learn the one sentence, and I can just tell you what it is. It's the same on every page of the tome." He flipped through the tome to show that all of the pages looked exactly the same.

"For every tome ever?"

"No, only the same type of tome. This Thunder tome has a special sentence, but an Elthunder tome has a different, longer sentence, an Arcthunder tome has a different, even longer sentence, and so on. All you have to do is figure out what they are and remember them." He leaned in close to whisper in Morgan's ear. "Sometimes when he's trying to learn how to use a new tome, Daddy cheats and writes the sentence in the margins."

Morgan made a little gasp, like her father had just bestowed upon her the greatest secret known to humankind. "But I thought you said cheating is bad, Father!" she whispered back.

"I was just kidding, kiddo. It's not really cheating. A lot of mages do it at first to help them as they learn," Robin explained.

"Mother says real cheating is dis-hon-or-a-ble," Morgan spoke, accentuating every syllable of "dishonorable" like she did whenever she said a large word that she had trouble pronouncing.

"Yes, your mother is right. Real cheating is very bad," Robin nodded. "But where were we? Oh, right! So each type of

tome has a special sentence you have to say before you cast the magic. In this case, the Thunder tome's special sentence is 'Tonitrus, invocabo vires tempestas'. Do you think you can say that?"

Morgan blinked a few times and opened her mouth to speak, but she had already forgotten the phrase.

Robin laughed at her reaction. "See? That's why I write it in the margins. Here, I'll write it down for you." He removed the little ink well and quill he kept in a pocket of his coat and used them to write the phrase in large, clear letters. "There you go. How's that?"

The girl put the tome in her lap and read the words over and over with Robin correcting her mispronunciations until she got the phrase right each time. "Tonitrus, invocabo vires tempestas! How's that, Father?" she asked proudly.

"Sounds great to me. And do you know what's even better? Once you learn the phrase and know how it sounds, you don't even have to say it out loud! If you just think of the sentence, you can say it in your head and still cast the spell. Handy, huh?"

"That's why you never say anything when you cast spells, right, Father?"

"Right."

"But how does it work when you don't say it out loud? How can the tome hear you?" She hoisted the tome up into the air and glanced underneath it, as if the answer was hidden there just out of sight.

"Just like how all of this works. Magic!" He wiggled his fingers in mid-air, making the girl laugh.

"You're silly, Father!" she giggled, putting her hands on his leg.

"That's what I am. Super silly," Robin grinned. "So that's all there is to it for the first step. The second step is the tricky part, and the one that takes the most practice. Saying the words isn't enough to cast the spell."

"Then what do the words do?"

"When you say the right words, out loud or in your head, the tome you're holding will grant you the power to cast the spell deep inside you. Right in your tummy." He poked Morgan's stomach playfully, causing her to giggle again. "Your job is to move that power from your tummy to your hands, or channel it. Like this." He picked up the tome, was silent for just a moment, and with a swift flick of the wrist he had conjured a very tiny ball of lightning that hovered over his fingertips. He smiled when he saw Morgan's eyes light up in awe. "Pretty cool, huh?"

"Whoa! How did you *do* that, Father?" she asked eagerly.

"You have to really focus. Think really, really hard. You have to feel the power that the tome grants you flow through your whole body and out your hands. It gets easier the more you do it, I promise," Robin explained, holding his two index fingers up and bouncing the ball of lightning between them. "At first you might only be able to get a little bit of power, but as you practice more and more, you can get a lot more of that power to use *and* you can also control better how much power you want to use, like I just did. I only wanted to use a little bit of power, so I only made this little bit of magic. You want to play a little game with it?"

"A game?" Morgan asked excitedly. "I like your games, Father!"

"Watch," Robin nodded towards the tiny sparks on his finger. "Hold out your hands like you're trying to hold water in them."

"Like this?" the girl asked, cupping her two hands.

"Perfect. Now think really, really hard. I'm going to toss this little ball of lightning to you, and you're going to catch it right before it hits your hands."

"But what if I miss? Will it hurt?"

"Don't worry. It's so weak that it won't hurt at all if you miss. It will just feel like a little pinch, that's all," the man reassured. "But you don't have to worry about that because I don't think you're going to miss. I think you can do it."

"Really?" Morgan looked relieved. "You're always right, Father, so I must be able to do it! I'll try my very hardest!" She held her hands out confidently.

"You ready?" Robin asked.

Morgan nodded.

"Are you thinking really, really hard?"

Morgan squeezed her eyes shut and nodded again.

"Then I'm going to pass it to you," Robin told her, and with a flick of his finger threw the ball of lightning into his daughter's hands.

"D...Did I do it?" she asked cautiously, afraid of disappointing her father if she didn't.

"Why don't you open your eyes and see for yourself?"

The girl slowly opened her eyes to find the sparks floating above her cupped hands perfectly. She gasped and put on the happiest grin. "I...I did it, Father! Look! I'm holding it just like you did! Yay!"

"Great job, kiddo! I knew you could do it!" Robin ruffled her hair. "Now for the game: we're going to play catch, but with magic! Can you try tossing it back to me?"

"Yeah!" Morgan nodded. She paused as she concentrated hard, and with a flick of her hand she tossed the ball of lightning back to Robin, who caught it on his fingertip again.

"Now try to catch it on your finger like me. Here it comes!" He tossed the magic to Morgan again, who managed to balance it on her finger after struggling with it for only a brief moment. They began to throw the ball of lightning back and forth, with Morgan becoming more skillful at controlling its path each time she did so. After quite a few successful volleys, Robin caught the magic once more and spoke. "You were great at that!" he congratulated. "When you really want to cast a spell, or just want to release the power that you have contained, you just have to expel it all at once, or throw it away. Like this." He pointed his finger up into the air and released the energy, shooting it out into the air as a short bolt of electricity that quickly fizzed out. Upon doing so, the open page of the Thunder tome that Robin had written on glowed very faintly and suddenly dissolved into nothingness.

"Ah! Father!" Morgan cried, pointing at the tome. "The page! It's gone! Where did it go?"

"Well, each time you release the power that the page of the tome grants you, it vanishes because you used all its power up. When you use up all the pages, the tome becomes powerless and you have to get a new one. We can use this Thunder tome up as much as we want for practice though. They're pretty easy to come by, and we have a lot in the convoy."

"Oh, okay."

"Do you want to try casting a spell of your own now without me having to do it?" Robin offered, placing the tome in her lap. "Maybe it's too early... You might need some more practice focusing, but it doesn't hurt to try. Don't be upset if you can't do it your very first time..." As he was talking, Morgan was already speaking the ancient words and concentrating, and by the time Robin had finished, she released a tiny spark of lightning from her fingertip. Another page from the tome disappeared. He blinked, absolutely shocked. "You... you did it... You did it! You just casted magic all by yourself!" He shook his head with a smile on his face, bursting with pride.

"I really did it, Father!" Morgan shouted happily.

"You really did it!" Robin echoed, pulling the girl in for a hug. "My baby girl can cast magic all by herself already!"

"I'm going to go show Mommy!" the girl cried eagerly, standing up and running off immediately. She held the tome tightly in one hand and was happily firing off tiny sparks of lightning left and right as she went.

"Morgan!" Robin called after her, scrambling to get up. "Where are you going? Slow down!" She had already run around the side of the tent by the time he was on his feet. "Morgan! Come back!"

Morgan didn't seem to hear him. She was having far too much fun exercising her new ability and was hardly looking where she was exactly shooting the sparks she was creating.

Unfortunately one of her stray sparks struck a leg, and immediately a furious Panne whipped around, sharp teeth bared and prominent even in her human form. "Who did that?" she shouted angrily, narrowed eyes darting around to locate her apparent attacker as she reached for the beaststone in one her belt pouches.

The sudden yell snapped Morgan from her bliss-like state and startled her so much that she dropped the tome on the

ground. She took one look at the taguel's angry expression and burst into tears. "Daddy!" she screamed, turning around and running back in the direction that she had come. "Daddy!"

"Morgan?" Robin hurried out from behind the tent. "Morgan! What's wrong?!" He crouched down low to the ground and held his arms out wide. The girl leapt into them, burying her face in his shoulder as she continued to bawl. "What's the matter, love? What happened? Tell Daddy." She couldn't respond; she was still crying too hard. "Shh..." he attempted to soothe her. "It's okay... Daddy's got you..."

Panne sighed deeply, sudden burst of anger gone. She bent down to retrieve the tome that Morgan had dropped and walked over to Robin.

"Oh, Panne!" Robin greeted quickly. "Did you see what happened to Morgan? I thought I heard you say something just now."

"Yes. Your kit zapped the back of my leg with her magic, and I assumed that I was being attacked, so I turned around angrily..."

"Ah..." Robin understood at once, knowing well how ferocious the taguel could look when she was angered. "You just startled her. Is that right, Morgan?" he asked softly in the girl's ear. "Did you just get a little scared?"

"S...Scary..." Morgan whimpered.

"You have to be more careful, love..." Robin sighed, hugging her close. "Magic can be very dangerous, and it can really hurt people... That's why I wanted you to stay with me..." He rocked her a bit in his arms. "I'm sorry about that, Panne... I should have been watching her more closely."

"No," the taguel shook her head. "The fault is mine for responding so furiously. The magic did not hurt; it was only a slight shock. Ever since I birthed Yarne my senses have been particularly on edge," she explained. "Taguel mothers are... very protective of their kits when they are young, even when they are far away. My parental instincts still tell me to respond with fierceness at the slightest surprise or indication of danger. Your kit is still learning and is prone to mistakes. I must be the one to apologize."

Robin smiled warmly. "You're very kind, Panne. I appreciate your understanding. Morgan still should have been paying more attention to what she was doing though, isn't that right, love?"

"Here, little one," Panne spoke, holding out the Thunder tome. "I believe this belongs to you."

Morgan slowly poked her head out from her father's shoulder and very cautiously took the tome from her, large brown eyes still watery.

"Morgan," Robin urged softly. "Can you say you're sorry to Miss Panne? You just scared her a little bit too, just like she scared you."

"S...Sorry Miss Panne..." the girl sniffed, feeling bad about what she had done.

"It is alright, young one." Panne gave a rare smile before addressing Robin once more. "You must excuse me then. I am to teach the future Yarne about the many types of herbs and their medicinal properties today."

"Fascinating," Robin noted. "I hope it proves to be worthwhile."

"I can only hope," Panne spoke bluntly. "Goodbye, Robin. Goodbye, young one."

"Goodbye, Panne. Thank you again."

"G...Goodbye..."

Once the taguel had left, Robin turned to Morgan again. "Are you feeling better, Morgan?"

The girl sniffed. "A little..."

"It's okay, love. It was an accident. But now you know to be more careful when you're using magic, right? I just don't want you to hurt herself or someone else when you use it, that's all."

Morgan looked down, still slightly ashamed of herself.

"Hey..." Robin bounced her in his arms once as he tried to lighten her mood. "You still *used* magic today for the first time,

and you were absolutely fantastic at it. You got pretty much everything right on your first try, and I'm still very proud of you, Morgan."

Morgan hugged his neck tightly. "You're the coolest, Dad."

"As long as I'm the coolest dad, I'm also the happiest dad," Robin smiled. "Now how about we go show your mother what you can do now."

"Then can we have tactician lessons?"

"Then we can have tactician lessons."

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Morgan sat on a large crate, kicking her legs back and forth through the air as she watched her mother train. She found that watching other people swordfighting was quite boring, but there was something about watching Lucina that fascinated her immensely. She could just sit and observe her train for hours on end, eyes following every swing of Falchion.

Ordinarily she would watch and wait for her mother to finish so that they could go play, but today Morgan decided that she would practice alongside her. Hopping down from the crate, she scoured the ground around her, taking care like she had been told not to get too close to Lucina while she was swinging a sword. Finally she found a stick she liked, one that was just the right length but not too heavy. Holding her "sword" in both hands, the girl assumed her mother's fighting stance to the best of her memory. She bent her knees and held the stick parallel to the ground near her face but forgot how Lucina positioned her hands exactly, so she did what was most comfortable for the time being. Putting on a confident expression, she swung the stick out in front of her a few times, shouting a little "Hyah!" every so often.

Lucina performed a downwards slash on the training dummy she faced, and then reassumed her ready stance. With a shout she unleashed her condensed energy and leapt forward, stabbing her target through the chest with Falchion. Satisfied with her performance, she pulled her blade from the dummy and sheathed it at her hip, and it was only then that she even noticed her daughter still imitating her sword strikes behind her. "Who taught you to stick-fight like that, love?" she smiled after watching her for a minute.

"It's not a stick! It's my sword!" the girl insisted, taking another swing with it. "And you taught me, Mother! I watch you really, really hard when you train, so I can learn how you do it."

"Well, you're quite good for just having watched me," Lucina noted. "Your stance is just like mine and your swings are controlled, even with that stick. You could do much better with an actual practice sword though, love..."

Just as she spoke, Morgan swung her stick again and it snapped in half. She looked upset as she showed what had happened to Lucina. "Mother! My sword broke... I need a new one now!" At that, she cast away the remaining half of the stick in her hand and began to search for a new stick on the ground.

"How about we get you a real one now, Morgan?" Lucina offered, taking her hand and leading her inside. She reached into a chest and removed a short wooden sword, far too small to be used by an adult but perfect for a child who was Morgan's age. "Here, love. Try this one instead. It shouldn't break as easily."

Morgan eagerly took it and slashed at the air a few times, grin quickly forming on her face. "I like this one, Mother!" she cried. "It's much better than my other sword."

"I would hope so," Lucina chuckled as the girl tested the sword even further. "Would you like me to show you a few things about swordfighting? I know you're already practicing magic with your father, so it might be a lot to take in..."

"I can do it, Mother! I like learning!" Morgan insisted.

"Okay, then. Let's go back outside," Lucina told her, grabbing a wooden training sword of her own as they walked out. "I suppose we should start with the basics. Can you get in your ready stance for me?"

The girl did as she was told, assuming her mother's battle stance.

Lucina looked her over quickly. "Your form is very good," she complimented. "All you need to do is fix your hands a little

bit."

"How, Mother?" she asked, shifting her hands around on the sword's hilt.

"I can help," Lucina offered. She reached down to take the girl's hands in her own, and then guided them into their proper positions. "How does that feel? Comfortable?"

"Com-for-ta-ble," Morgan nodded, reproducing the word carefully.

"Good! You always want to take a battle stance before you attack or when you need to block another attack," she explained. "We could probably go right to practice from here." She knelt down so that she was closer to Morgan's height. "I'm going to hold my sword up like this, Morgan, and I want you to swing your own sword and hit mine from the side. Do you think you can do that?"

Morgan nodded, and once she was ready, she started performing horizontal slashes of her sword against that of her mother's.

After a few swings, Lucina changed her blade position so that Morgan had to use vertical slashes instead. She offered a few brief words of advice, but kept it very simple and overlooked minor details for now so that the girl wouldn't feel overwhelmed. Once they had gone over most of the very basic sword attacks, Lucina let the girl loose on one of the training dummies so she could put both her new skills together with the more advanced moves she was able to replicate from watching her mother.

"I beat him, Mother!" Morgan huffed after a minute or two.

"You beat the training dummy?"

"Yeah! I won!" she declared triumphantly, even though her wooden sword hadn't even scratched her target.

"Good job, love," Lucina smiled. "Do you want to practice with Mommy now?"

"With you, Mother? Like a game? I love games!"

"Yes, like a game. The first person to touch the other with her sword wins!"

"I'm gonna win!" the girl shouted excitedly, bouncing up and down. "I'm gonna beat you, Mother!"

"We'll see... Remember to get into your battle stance first," Lucina reminded her daughter. "Now... start!"

Morgan rushed forward, swinging her little sword and trying to slip past her mother's defenses. Lucina could have easily won as soon as the game began, but she chose to remain on the defensive rather than the offensive. She took more time to parry Morgan's attacks and every so often pretended to strike at her only to let the girl block her attacks. Lucina picked up the pace ever so slowly, and in response Morgan started to incorporate more of her mother's moves into her own.

Lucina could see her tiring quickly, so she decided to give the girl an opening to see if she could both recognize and take it. She moved her sword far to the right in preparation for a mock strike, purposely leaving her left side wide open. Morgan saw the weakness in her mother's defense, and in preparation for her finishing move, she quickly raised her sword into the air. Her hands however slipped on the hilt and the sword flew from her fingers, hitting her on the forehead. Morgan stood petrified for just a moment, eyes watering and lip quivering, before starting to cry.

"Oh, poor baby..." Lucina dropped her sword and knelt to give her a long hug. "That must have hurt..."

"I...It hurts, Mommy..." Morgan sobbed, clutching her forehead.

"Here, let Mommy see..." Lucina urged, gently moving the girl's hands away. "It's okay," she sighed in relief. "It's just a little bump. It will feel better if you rub it, love."

The girl heeded her mother's suggestion and started to rub her bruise for a few moments.

"Does that feel better?" Lucina asked.

Morgan shook her head no.

"That didn't work? How about... this?" She leaned closer to Morgan and kissed her forehead. "Do Mommy's kisses help?"

A tiny smile formed on Morgan's lips before fading. "A little..."

"Only a little?" Lucina cried, pretending to be shocked to make the girl laugh. "Well then... I guess you're just going to need another kiss," she smiled, kissing her forehead again. "Is it better now?"

Morgan giggled a little. "Not yet, Mommy!"

"Still not yet?" Lucina asked, giving her yet another kiss. "How about *now*?"

"Now it's better!" Morgan laughed as she sat in her mother's lap.

"Oh, good!" Lucina ran her fingers through her daughter's hair. "Mommy is so happy that you're okay because Mommy never wants to see you sad."

"I'm not sad anymore, Mommy! Now I'm happy because you gave my head lots of kisses!"

Lucina laughed. "How much does Mommy love you?" she asked.

"So, so much!"

"That's right. Mommy loves you so, so much."

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The memories briefly faded away. Morgan seemed sad to watch them go, keeping her eyes trained on the last spot that she had seen Lucina's face. "Mother... My mother..."

"Do you still wish for me to continue, young one?" Naga spoke quietly. "I showed you some of the most pleasant times you spent growing up with your parents. I still feel the need to warn you."

"Why do you have to warn her?" Chrom asked. "Morgan's future seems... happy."

"I must do so..." Naga began. "For from this point on, her history becomes one of even greater despair than Lucina's..."

"Greater despair?" Lucina asked in shock. "How is that even possible?"

"I...I must know, Naga... No matter how painful these memories may be..." Morgan spoke hollowly.

Naga sighed and continued with Morgan's tale. "After the years of conflict, the halidom of Ylisse finally prevailed once again over the Valmese forces and another era of peace appeared to be in sight. However, united by the war, Plegia was now prepared to summon the Fell Dragon. Events that followed were almost identical to the ones that occurred in this timeline. Validar used Robin to steal the Fire Emblem, and then Lucina attempted to take his life..."

"I... tried to kill him in that timeline as well?" Lucina stammered, looking ashamed. "Even when w...we had Morgan?"

"Yes..." Naga nodded and waved her hand, causing a brief scene to appear before them. The two figures in the forest clearing seemed far away, and only a portion of their conversation could be heard.

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"Robin, I...I didn't want to do this..." Lucina struggled to speak, eyes darting from her own shaking hand to the man in front of her. "I I...love you so much... Y...You're my husband... and you're my daughter's father..." She paused, repeating her own words over again in her head. "Oh gods... You're my husband and my daughter's father... I...I can't... I can't do this to you... H...How can I kill the man who I promised to spend the rest of my days with?" She lowered Falchion. It fell to the ground. She took a step towards him.

"B...But Lucina!" Robin stammered. "You were right before! I'm still dangerous! I'm a threat!"

"I was wrong. You're not dangerous, Robin. And you're not a threat." Lucina attempted a smile. "You're my husband." She took another step forward.

"Lucina!" Robin cried, taking a step back. "H...He could still use me... He could use me to hurt you! He could use me to hurt Morgan! W...We can't take that chance!"

"I'm willing to take it." Lucina's smile didn't falter. "I know you more than anyone. You would never hurt us." She took another step forward, and almost instantly hunched over in pain, experiencing the mental attack by Grima.

"Lucina!"

"Robin..." she spoke, still trying to maintain her smile. She stood more upright with a great deal of effort and reached her hand out to him. She tried taking yet another step, but the closer she got to Robin the more intense the headache became.

"Oh gods... T...This is my fault!" Robin cried. "P...Please, Lucina! Stay back!"

"T...This... isn't... you..." Lucina spoke, fighting through the pain and still trying to reach him. "You... would never... do this..."

Robin took a few more steps back, realizing that the closer Lucina was to him, the more pain she experienced.

"P...Please!" he begged desperately. "I'm hurting you! Stay away from me! Stay away from what I'm becoming!"

"I... don't care... what you are... or what you're becoming..." Lucina told him. "I'll still... love you..."

Robin was silent for a moment before speaking very quietly. "Not a monster," he said at last. "You can't love a monster..." With that statement, he turned around and ran, leaving Lucina behind and alone.

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"After Robin left," Naga continued once the scene faded. "Chrom and his army soon discovered the whereabouts of Validar and the Fire Emblem. When they arrived however, they were forced to fight particularly dangerous opponents..."

"The Deadlords..." Chrom murmured. "We almost lost that battle..."

"They were once great heroes," Naga explained. "Noble and true, they combatted villainy and injustice throughout the sagas and were the most powerful warriors of their time. Channeled through the corrupt tome Goetia, Grima's power disturbed their eternal rest and reanimated their bodies, turning them against you." The Divine Dragon paused. "It would be best... for me to show you..."

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"Aunt Lissa!" Lucina called as she rushed into the medical tent. Her arms and legs were cut and bloodied from her encounter with the Deadlord assassin.

"Lucina!" Lissa responded, completing a healing spell on a wounded soldier with her staff. She walked over to her, looking incredibly tired. "Geez, you have cuts everywhere! Do you want me to help?"

"No, Aunt Lissa. My injuries are minor and of our least concern. There are many others who need your abilities more than I right now," Lucina huffed, trying to catch her breath. "I came to make sure that no Risen had slipped past the guards and reached this tent. Is Morgan okay?"

"Mother!" Morgan shouted. She emerged from behind a cot and ran to Lucina's side. "Ah! Your arms and legs, Mother! You're hurt! I'll find some bandages!"

"No, love. I'm okay for now," Lucina reassured, stroking her daughter's hair for a moment. "I just wanted to make sure you were safe."

"I'm good, Mother..."

"She's been very helpful," Lissa added. "She'll bring the medicines and supplies that the other healers and I ask her for. She's been speeding up our job a lot."

"Yeah, Mother!" Morgan nodded. "I like to help!"

"I'm so proud of you, love," Lucina smiled. "Helping people and saving lives is one of the greatest things that you can ever do."

"You help people a lot, Mother! I want to be just like you!"

"It isn't going well out there, I guess..." Lissa spoke tiredly. "We never had this many injuries in a battle before... I can hardly keep up with all these wounded soldiers..."

"My father is still..." Lucina began.

"Not good!" Brady interrupted as he burst through the tent flap, hauling an injured man on his shoulder. He placed the man down on an empty cot and muttered something under his breath. Lucina was glad that Morgan didn't hear whatever he was saying, for it was more likely than not a string of foul curses.

"Brady!" Maribelle scolded, suddenly looking up from her patients. Lucina had absolutely no idea how Maribelle had managed to hear him from across the tent when she herself hadn't been able to. "Only low-born troglodytes use those kinds of crude words!"

"Well now's the time to use all of 'em, Ma!" Brady shouted angrily back. "We're in deep trouble!"

"Brady! What's the matter?" Lucina asked.

"Lucina! I didn't even see ya there!" the man responded, rushing over to her. "If anyone can help us, it's you! One of those damn Deadlords is making its way here!"

"What about the guards?! We have double the usual number around this tent!"

"It's cutting 'em all down left and right!" Brady explained grimly. "Can you believe this Risen trash?! Attacking the sick and wounded?! I'd kill it myself if I could fight, I would!"

Lucina's face twisted into one of determination. "I'll stop it. Where's it coming from, Brady?"

"The south," Brady replied. "You won't miss it. It's making a beeline for us!"

"I'll be back," Lucina spoke, hands finding Falchion.

"Be careful, Lucina..." Lissa warned.

"Mother!" Morgan exclaimed, hugging Lucina's leg. "Be careful!"

"I'll be fine, love," Lucina bent down and gave her a quick hug before standing and unsheathing Falchion. "If your safety is on the line, nothing will stop me!" With that, she sprinted outside and began to charge the Deadlord swordmaster head on to stop its advance. With Lucina's burst of speed, she managed to counter it far away from the medical tent.

As soon as their paths met, Lucina lunged forward and locked blades with the creature. The Risen attempted to push her blade away, roaring angrily that its path was blocked. Lucina struggled to match the Deadlord's surprising strength, but it was just then that she realized what was truly at stake. "If I... allow you... to pass, my daughter... will die..." Lucina hissed at the creature with all the anger that she could manage. "I. Will not. Lose!" The pains in her arms and legs became nothing to her as she was overwhelmed with adrenaline. With a shout, she overpowered her opponent and pushed its blade away.

The Deadlord stumbled back, growling with frustration that Lucina was no easy opponent. Giving it no time to recover, Lucina rushed forward, trying to bring Falchion down to crush its head. The creature just barely raised its sword up in time, deflecting her attack. It attempted an attack of its own that Lucina parried perfectly, giving her another opening to go on the offensive. Her blows were quick and fierce; she was trying to use her newfound energy to overwhelm the Deadlord with unrelenting attacks. Finding another opening, she brought her blade down diagonally onto the Risen's shoulder. Falchion didn't cleave through it all the way, but it did leave a sizable slice before it slid off. Before it could even react to the blow, Lucina then brought her blade immediately up and struck the creature's same shoulder from underneath, effectively severing its arm.

The creature roared with fury, belching a cloud of poison smoke from its mouth. Lucina didn't flinch in the slightest and attempted the same move on its sword arm. Realizing what Lucina was trying to do, the Deadlord slipped out of range and lashed out, cutting Lucina's left thigh. The pain did nothing but make Lucina angrier, and she continued to attack with full force. She managed to land a few more minor blows, but she still couldn't land a finishing strike on it. Lucina crouched slightly and sprung forward, kicking out the Deadlord's legs to throw it off balance. Instead of tripping and falling like Lucina expected, the creature broke into a roll on the ground. Catching Lucina off guard with its sudden recovery, the Deadlord swung its sword again at Lucina's leg, burying it deep inside the wound it had created before.

Lucina cried out in agony as she felt her leg grow warm with her blood. The powerful blow to her already open gash was incredibly painful, an injury she couldn't ignore now. Taking advantage of Lucina's wound, the Risen kicked her leg right

below the knee. Unlike the Deadlord however, Lucina wasn't able to recover as easily with the searing pains through her thigh, and she fell backwards onto the ground and dropped Falchion just out of reach. The creature had her pinned down before she could react. Lucina clenched her teeth and struggled to get back up with her remaining strength, but her leg was just too much to bear and she fell back onto the ground. The Deadlord raised its sword above its head, pointing it downwards. "Morgan!" Lucina screamed desperately, eyes wide.

There was a loud shout to her right. Robin, dirtied and exhausted, burst from the ruins surrounding the battlefield. He desperately raised his Levin Sword and fired deadly lightning from its tip at the Deadlord just as it was bringing its weapon down on Lucina's chest. The bolt struck the creature too late. Only by a second. The single second that changed the world's history.

Robin's eyes went wide. His mouth opened to shout, but he could only manage a rasping sound from his throat. He swallowed hard as his gaze drifted to the stumbling Deadlord, which had just barely survived his lightning strike, and all at once anger flooded his eyes. "NO!" he screamed with a mix of rage and horror, and he began to charge the creature standing over Lucina at top speed, brandishing his weapon wildly. As soon as the Deadlord was within his reach, Robin plunged the Levin Sword's jagged blade deep into the creature's chest effortlessly, and then tore it out and stabbed it again. "How do YOU like it?!" he screamed at the creature, stabbing it repeatedly as it dissolved. When it had completely disappeared, Robin dropped his weapon, fell to his knees, and crawled to Lucina's side.

"Lucina! Oh gods... Lucina!" he cried in a state of complete panic. Her tunic and leg were so red with blood that it was hard to even determine where her actual wounds were. "L...Listen to me! Please! Lucina!"

Lucina lifted her head just barely off the ground with an incredible amount of effort and opened her eyes to no more than a squint. "R...Robin?" she wheezed. "Is... Is that you?"

"Yes! Yes, it's me, love," Robin responded. "I...I'm here!"

She removed one of her hands from her chest and reached up weakly with shaking, bloodstained fingers. Robin squeezed tightly, trying to ignore how cold it had already become.

"It... is you..." she sighed, faint smile appearing on her lips. "Y...You... came back..."

"I'm here, love... I'm here..." Robin attempted to sound soothing, but it was difficult as his voice started to break. He carefully removed Lucina's other hand from her chest to expose her horrific stab wound. "Oh gods... Oh gods oh gods oh gods..." he whimpered.

"I...It's that... bad?" Lucina asked, resting her head back on the sandy earth.

Robin placed Lucina's hand down gently at her side and then immediately pulled the sleeves of his coat over his own hands and pressed down hard on her chest, trying to apply pressure to her wound and stop the bleeding. The action did little more than stain his coat sleeves red, but he didn't care in the slightest. He just kept trying to cover the wound as if he was trying to push the life back inside her. "It's g...going to be okay, Lucina," he reassured emptily. "Healer!" he screamed out into the sky. "I need a healer!" They were so far away from the medical tent, and his voice was drowned out in the roar of the battle that still raged on all around them. Robin looked around desperately, scanning the battlefield in hopes that he could find anyone who could help her.

"R...Robin... Love..." Lucina rasped. "It's too... late... I've... already lost... so much blood..."

"No... No! It's not too late!" Robin cried, eyes beginning to tear. "Y...You can't s...say that, Lucina! Please! Stay strong!"

"I'm... getting... cold... Am I... going to die?"

"No, Lucina! You aren't going to die!" he wailed, keeping one hand firmly pressed down on her chest as he fumbled for the emergency bandages he kept inside his coat. He ripped them out, trying to wrap up her chest. They just weren't working. She was losing more and more blood every second, and he was powerless to stop it. "I need a healer!" he screamed again, as loud as he could manage. "Please! I need a healer! Anyone! Please!" There was no response, but he refused to give up. "Healer! I need... a healer!" he begged, voice becoming weaker. "I... need... a healer..." It was when he still received no response that he truly realized she couldn't be saved.

"Oh gods... Oh gods... Lucina..." He let his tears fall freely, unable to conceal them anymore. Robin gently removed his hands from Lucina's chest and slipped them underneath her back, lifting her upper torso up onto his knees. "My beautiful wife..." He cradled her head in his bloodied hands. "My one and only love... Don't leave me..."

"R...Robin? A...Are you still... there?" she asked, voice scarcely a whisper.

"I...I'm still here, Lucina... I won't leave you... if you won't... leave me..."

"S...So this is it..." Lucina sighed. "After all... we've been through... My j...journey has come... to its end..."

"No... No... I don't... want it... to end!" Robin cried, choking on his own words. "W...We have so much more to do together! All of the plans that we made!"

"I... won't be able... to do them with you... love..." Lucina whispered. "I... can't..."

"You... h...have to, Lucina!" he begged. "Don't you remember? W...When we exchanged our vows on our wedding day?"

"I remember... I could... never forget..." Lucina smiled. "The day we got married... was the happiest day... of my life... After all... the pain and sadness I've experienced... you made me... the happiest girl... in the whole world..."

"We m...made a promise, Lucina! We promised that we would live... the rest of our lives together! H...How can I do that if y...you aren't with me? You need to stay with me, Lucina! I need you!"

"Y...You can keep going, R...Robin... You're s...strong... You can make it... My husband... is strong..."

"I can't, Lucina! Why can't you see?!" Robin cried desperately. "You are the one who makes me s...strong! I'm nothing without you! Nothing! Y...You're my better half! My everything! Your smile is the most beautiful thing in the world. Your laugh is my favorite sound. The feeling of your heartbeat when I have you in my arms is the only thing that puts me to sleep every night! I can't live without you! Not anymore!"

"I'm so sorry, love... But... you have to... for Morgan... You have to..." With each passing second, Lucina's breathing became more and more labored.

"But what am I supposed to tell her?!" Robin shouted in desperate anger. "What am I supposed to tell Morgan? That... that Mommy is gone? Gone forever? That she'll never see your face or hear your voice again? Who's going to be there to pick her up when she falls or kiss her goodnight? Who?" He slammed a shaking fist down on the ground. "Who?!"

"You will, love..." Lucina smiled weakly. "You're a...wonderful father... Morgan... loves you to death..."

"M...Morgan loves you more!" Robin's brief anger subsided and he broke out into fresh sobs. "She idolizes you! W...Whenever she's sad she always goes to you because you always make her feel better... She can live without me! She can't live without you! Your family needs you!"

Lucina didn't respond. She could only stare at him sadly.

"O...Our family..." he sniffed. "Our perfect family... You, me, and our little girl... W...We can't be a family without you..."

"I'm sorry, love... I'm sorry..."

Robin hugged her body tighter, knowing that nothing he could say or do could change her fate now. Lucina closed her eyes for a moment and was quiet before speaking.

"Robin..."

"Y...Yes?"

"Take care of Morgan... She needs you now... more than ever... When she's old enough... to understand, tell her... that I died thinking of her... and that her mommy loves her... so, so much..." A single tear ran down her cheek. Robin wiped it off gently with his thumb. "Be strong... Keep fighting... End this war... Bring peace... for me..." Lucina told him. "I know... you can... You're... the most incredible man... I know... These past few years... have been the best of my life... I need to thank you... for bringing me happiness... I'm so lucky... to have such an amazing husband..."

"I...I'm the lucky one..." Robin spoke, caressing her cheek. "I have such a pretty, noble, and loving wife, remember?"

Lucina laughed lightly. It only lasted just a moment before it turned into a wheezing cough, but Robin heard it. His favorite sound that couldn't be played on any instrument.

"...Do you remember?" she asked with a small smile. "The house... we said... we would build?"

"I...It was going to be beautiful..." Robin responded, using every reserve of strength he had left to smile back.

"It was..." she sighed. "And it... was going to have... the most beautiful flower garden... filled with white daisies... As far as

the eye could see... there would just be... daisies... I wish... I could have seen them..."

"You will, love..." Robin struggled to maintain his smile. It was hard to do with warm tears gushing down his cheeks. "You're going... to go to the most beautiful flower garden ever..."

"Filled with daisies?"

"F...Filled with daisies..." he stuttered. "As far as the eye can see... Just... daisies... A...And you'll be able to walk through them forever... And you'll never be sad... and you'll never feel pain ever again... T...That's the place you'll go..."

"It sounds lonely though..." Lucina whispered, breathing faint. "Will you come... to see me someday? We promised... to live together... forever..."

"Of course I will, Lucina... As soon as I can... when Morgan doesn't need me... I'll come for you... And I'll search until the end of time until I find you... And we'll live together in that garden of daisies for all of eternity..."

"G...Good..." Lucina smiled. "I...I'm h...happy... Y...You... make... me... happy..." She lifted a bloodied, shaking hand, reaching for her husband's cheek that seemed so far away. It was just too hard to hold her eyes open anymore. "I... love..." She couldn't finish. Her breathing stopped. Her body went limp. Her outstretched hand started to fall, never having reached its destination.

Robin caught it before it could hit her chest and placed her palm against his cheek like she had intended. He held his breath, waiting for a voice he would never hear again. Very slowly he leaned down and brushed his lips against hers. They were still warm. "I love you too," he whispered back. "You were my life... A...And now... my life is over..." He buried his face in her hair and cried. Long, mourning cries that couldn't stop.

The battle continued on around them. The Shepherds were being pushed back. They were losing. Robin didn't notice. He just knelt where the earth was stained red with exalted blood, cradling his lost wife's head in his arms. It seemed like hours. It was only a few minutes before a voice called his name.

"Robin! It's you!" Chrom shouted from afar, running towards him. "Robin, what are you..." He saw the woman Robin held and fell silent, stopping in his tracks for a moment. He walked with uneasy steps up to them, gazing down at his bloodied, lifeless daughter. "Lucina..."

Robin had never seen Chrom cry. Being a leader had taught him many things, one of which was to remain strong at all times for those he led. He had come close when Emmeryn died, but had masked his sorrow with anger. He shifted his weight to one side uncomfortably, trying very hard to maintain a stoic face as he attempted to mentally cope with the situation.

"R...Robin... What happened?" he asked slowly, walking up close and bending down in front of him. Chrom reached out with a cautious hand to touch his daughter's skin, but as soon as Robin saw the gesture he hunched over Lucina protectively.

"No!" he shouted angrily, eying Chrom like he was an enemy. "You can't take her from me!"

"Robin, I wasn't..."

"Y...You can't..." he sniveled, shielding her body even more with his own as if Chrom had the intention of harming it.

"Robin..." Chrom stood, making the other man relax somewhat. He glanced from his broken friend to the battle behind him. He couldn't find anything to say.

"A...All she wanted..." Robin choked out after a while. "All she wanted was peace. All she wanted was happiness. All she wanted was a world without war. She endured the most. She worked the hardest. She lost her family. She lost her friends. She fought through it all. She survived the apocalypse. She defied time to save a world that wasn't hers. N...Now... she's gone... without ever winning the peace she wanted..." He swallowed hard, struggling to continue. "All my career as a tactician, I've worked as hard as I could to keep every single person safe. No one has ever died on my watch before... B...But now... in the end... I couldn't save the person I loved the most..." He looked down at Lucina's pale face and brushed a few strands of stray hair from her forehead. "My wife... My wife is dead!" he screamed into the sky, pouring all the grief and anger he had into one sentence before breaking down again. "And it's all my fault!"

"Robin..." Chrom spoke softly. "This... wasn't your fault... You didn't do this..."

"This is my fault, Chrom! My fault!" he sobbed, shaking his head. "I should have stayed! I shouldn't have left! I should have stayed by her side and kept her safe! She should still be alive right now! I could have saved her, but I killed her

instead! My fault... My fault..."

"No!" Chrom growled. "This is Grima's fault! All of this! *He* took my daughter's life, and now I'm going to take his!" There was a massive explosion far behind him in the Shepherds' ranks, and he looked back with clenched teeth. "We're running out of time... We can't keep fighting like this for much longer..." He strained his eyes, searching for anyone close by. "Gregor!" he called, waving him over. "Gregor!"

"Yes? What do you need from Gregor?" the man asked as he got closer. His arm was bloodied but didn't look too badly injured. He paused as soon as he saw Robin with Lucina, face growing somber. "Oy... The wee princess... Is bad... Very bad..." He patted Chrom and Robin's shoulders supportively. "Gregor's condolences... Gregor knows pain of losing family member. Feels like spear straight through heart."

"W...Worse..." Robin whimpered quietly.

"Gregor," Chrom spoke after a moment of silence. "I need you to run back to the medical tent and tell my sister that we have to enter the Dragon's Table immediately and to take Morgan and every able-bodied soldier well enough to fight with her. I'm going to create an escort force to protect them at all costs."

"But job still not done here," the older man reminded him. "Risen still 'alive and kicking' as young say."

"We don't have a choice. The Deadlords are just too strong, and they keep summoning new soldiers. We have to push our way through and stop Grima's resurrection before it's too late!"

"Some people hurt very bad, yes? Need medicine and rest, not fighting," Gregor spoke in concern.

Chrom grimaced, looking like he was about to make one of the hardest decisions of his life. "We're going to have to leave them behind... We *could* assign a defensive force to the medical tent, but I'm afraid they'll be crushed as well... Emm wouldn't like this one bit, but even more lives will be lost trying to protect them now..."

Gregor hesitated for a moment. "Gregor will do as he is being told. Just do not leave Gregor behind because he is old. Gregor can still fight as well as young man."

"We won't leave you behind, Gregor," Chrom assured. "Just hurry! And be sure to tell Lissa to take everyone she can! The less people we leave the better!"

"Yes, Gregor will tell!" the man nodded, running back towards camp.

"Robin, we have to go!" Chrom urged as he turned to his friend.

He didn't answer. Trying to focus on anything was an impossible task.

"Robin!" Chrom spoke a little louder. "We have to go!"

"I don't want to..." the man responded quietly. "I want to stay with my wife..."

"Please, Robin! We have to go now!" Chrom urged, tugging at his shoulder.

Robin's eyes suddenly went wide. "No! I can't! I can't leave my wife here!"

"We can come back for her, Robin! We can't take her inside!"

"And I can't leave her out here!"

"We don't have time for this..." Chrom murmured, glancing back at the battle anxiously. The frequency of the flashing lights in the Dragon's Table had increased significantly, and the clouds above it grew thicker by the second. Not good signs. "Robin... I'm sorry about this, but it's for your own good," he spoke as he walked behind him. Scooping his arms underneath Robin's, Chrom pulled him away from Lucina and onto his feet.

"No! I can't leave her!" Robin shouted desperately, attempting to writhe out of Chrom's grip like a trapped animal. "Put me down! I promised her we would stay together!"

"Robin, if you stay here, you'll die!"

"Then let me die!" Robin cried. "I don't care about living anymore! The person who made it worth living is gone now! We promised that we'd stay together, in life and in death!"

"What about Morgan, Robin?" Chrom asked back. "What about your daughter? Are you going to let yourself die and leave her all alone with no parents like Lucina was in her future?"

Robin froze.

"If you need a reason to live, then do it for her! Morgan still needs you, Robin! Don't leave her too!"

"Morgan... My baby girl..." he whimpered. "B...But Lucina... I need to bring her... to the most beautiful flower garden in the whole world... so she can rest there... I can't leave her yet..."

"Robin, I promise you we'll come back for her after we stop Grima and that she'll be given a proper burial. No one will forget about her," Chrom told him surely.

Robin took a long look at his fallen wife, and then finally stopped resisting, going almost limp with defeat in Chrom's arms. "...We promised..."

...

...

"Robin! Watch out!" Chrom darted in front of him with sword drawn. Catching Validar's dark magic with his blade, Chrom then swung Falchion to his side, deflecting the energy.

"Heheheh..." the Plegian king chuckled. "Why do you continue fighting, prince?" He gestured a spidery hand towards the barrier behind him. "Just look at the remains of your pathetic army! Half of your soldiers can't fight at all, and the other half has to protect them! Once the Deadlords finish off whoever you left to die outside, you will be surrounded on all sides! You and Naga have lost!"

"No!" Chrom shouted back. "Even if our chances of victory are slim, I'll keep fighting until the very end! My daughter taught me to stay strong and never surrender no matter how desperate the situation may be! Where there's hope, anything can change!"

"And look where the girl's ideals brought her," Validar sneered. "Not even her trip through time could change the inevitable future. She was doomed from the start and too stubborn to realize it. Only death could show her the error of her ways!"

That comment sent Robin over the edge. Slipping past Chrom, he charged Validar in rage, Thoron tome glowing with power he called upon its full strength. "You!" he hissed. "You killed her! You and your Risen killed her!" He held out his hand, firing an intense beam of lightning magic at him. "I'll kill you!"

Validar teleported before the beam could strike him and reappeared a few yards away, laughing evilly. "Such anger... Does the girl's failure truly upset you that much, my son?"

"She was my *wife*, you foul dastard!" Robin yelled, releasing a second bolt of Thoron. "You'll pay for what you did to her!"

"Was she?" Validar asked as he teleported again, pretending that he didn't know already. "I applaud your intentions, my son. Destroy the Exalted bloodline from within! You truly are Grima's chosen one!"

His words were having the desired effect on Robin, whose anger was beginning to cloud his focus. "I loved her!" he screamed. "She didn't deserve to die!"

"Oh, but she did," the Plegian king grinned. "She directly defied the will of Grima himself, and all who oppose him can only be punished by death!"

"Enough!" Robin bellowed. "She believed that the fate of the world could be changed, and I'm going to make that belief come true by killing you right here, right now!" He cast furious bolts of Thoron as fast as he could manage all around the room as Validar teleported.

"Robin! Stop!" Chrom yelled, keeping his distance so he wouldn't be struck by Robin's wild attacks. "This is exactly what he wants you to do! He's trying to exhaust your energy!"

"No! I almost... have him!" Robin shouted back, breathing hard. Sure enough, the strain of the consecutive, high-power magic attacks was beginning to take its toll on Robin's already physically exhausted body. "I'll... make the new world

Lucina dreamed of... a reality!"

"You'll change the world..." Validar nodded, holding out his hand as if he was reaching for Robin from afar. "But you'll make it into her worst nightmare!" His fingers clenched tightly, and almost immediately Robin collapsed to his knees, clutching his head in pain.

"Robin!" Chrom cried, rushing to his side and crouching down. He placed a firm hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay? Stay strong!" He shot up and rushed the Plegian king with Falchion trailing behind him. "Leave him be!" he growled, leaping into the air and raising his blade over his head.

"Persistent pest..." Validar hissed, forced to drop his control over Robin to counter Chrom with a burst of dark lightning. "Experience the true might of the Fell Dragon!" He released a continuous blast of magic so powerful that even when it was countered by Falchion, it still pushed Chrom backwards all the way across the room.

Robin was already back on his feet, and although he was a little shaky, he readied another attack. All it took was a single hand gesture from the Plegian king to reinitiate the mental attack, crippling Robin once again.

"Why do you continue to resist, my son?" Validar asked, taking a few strides closer. "In the shadow of Grima's imminent resurrection, you still deny his influence."

"No one... can stop me..." Robin spoke as he struggled to stand. "I'll... avenge her... You took her... from me..."

"That is where you are mistaken, my child. *I* didn't touch a hair on her head. Only *you* are to blame for her demise."

"Don't listen to him, Robin!" Chrom yelled as he recovered from Validar's attack. "He's wrong!"

"..."

"*You* could have arrived sooner. *You* could have blocked the fatal blow. *You* could have found a healer. *You* were responsible for her death!" Validar snarled. "You *killed* her, and she died harboring only hatred towards you!"

"Lucina... h...hates me?" Robin asked fearfully, fingernails digging into his scalp.

"Yes... Yes, she does..." Validar grinned. "You stole her life, and for that she'll never forgive you!"

"S...She w...won't? B...But... she said..."

"Don't listen to him, Robin! You know that's not true!"

"Look what you've done... You've failed, my son! You've single-handedly torn your family apart! You are no longer fit to protect anyone, least of all these doomed servants of Naga! Everything you've worked for has culminated in failure! Only with your god Grima may you find redemption!"

Robin's knees started shaking until they buckled, and he collapsed to the ground. "W...What... What have I done?" he moaned, covering his face with his hands. "This is... all my fault... I...I killed my wife..."

His face twisted in both sadness and pain, until, all at once, his expression went completely blank. For a moment, he seemed frozen in time, not moving or even breathing. An unsettlingly large smile formed on Validar's lips as Robin slowly stood up, lightning magic crackling at his fingertips.

"Yes... Accept Grima into your heart! Return him to this wor..."

Before he could finish, Robin summoned a dagger of lightning into his right hand, the hand with the Mark of Grima emblazoned on the back, and buried it into Validar's chest without a word.

"Guh... B...But... Master..." the Plegian king groaned, falling to his knees. "I've done... everything you've asked..."

Robin glared at him with sharp eyes but still said nothing.

Validar released a deep, guttural sound from his throat and collapsed, body disappearing in a burst of dark smoke akin to the Risen.

"Robin!" Chrom shouted, finally reaching him. "You... You did it! He's gone!" He placed a hand on Robin's shoulder and nodded with a reassuring smile. "Now we can build that world that Emm and Lucina believed in, Robin... A world of peace..."

"This world..." Robin spoke distantly. "...Is irredeemable..."

Chrom's smile disappeared. "...What do you mean? Validar is dead! We've stopped Grima's resurrection! The world is saved!"

"No, Chrom..." Robin pulled the cowl of his coat over his head just enough that it cast a shadow over his eyes. "All my life... you have disillusioned me. I was blind... but now I see... Everywhere we've gone, there has been war... Humankind is selfish and wicked."

"Robin, what are saying?" Chrom frowned, looking at the man strangely and removing his hand from his shoulder. "Some of the people we've met and fought against *were* cruel and evil, but not all of them! There are good people in this world, Robin. Lucina was a good person! She was thoughtful and kind, and she always took the needs of others into account before her own."

Robin seemed to grow agitated at the mention of Lucina's name, and he glared at Chrom intensely. "Then why is she gone?! Why must this world be one where the good are punished and the wicked survive? It is because this world is flawed, and humankind must be purged... Only a god can accomplish this task..."

"Robin! Listen to yourself! Are you out of your mind?!" Chrom yelled, grabbing Robin tightly by the arms. "This is Grima's influence! Fight him!"

"Take your hands *off of me!*" Robin screamed, flinging Chrom to the ground. "This has *always* been my desire! I will create a world without war for the woman I lost, and it can only be done by exterminating the human race!"

"You mean to stop all war by starting a war on humankind itself? Your logic is flawed! The Robin I know is smarter than that!" Chrom gritted his teeth and tried to stand up. "This isn't what Lucina wanted! This is what Lucina was trying to prevent!"

"*Don't tell me what she wanted!*" Robin reached down and seized Chrom by the throat, narrowed eyes blazing with rage. "I know what she wanted! She wanted a future, but it was stolen from her!" He raised Chrom an inch or two off the ground, holding him with inhuman strength. "If she can't have a future, no one can..." he hissed.

"T...Then what... about... Morgan?" Chrom gasped, trying to pry Robin's fingers from his neck. "You want... to take... her future away? L...Lucina told you... to protect her, didn't she? *That's w...what... she wanted... She wanted... her daughter... to grow up safe... and around... the p...people who loved her...*"

"...Then Morgan will be the only one I spare!" he yelled, throwing Chrom hard to the ground. Just as Chrom tried to take a deep breath in, Robin bent down and lifted him by the throat again. "Naga abandoned Lucina! Naga let her die! *She* is the true evil of this world! Her and all her followers! I will exterminate them one by one, starting with *you*..."

"R...Robin... Please..." Chrom choked, struggling for breath. "T...This... This isn't... you... Don't... let Grima... win! My d...daughter vowed... to stop Grima... and you promised her... that you... would stand by her... to achieve... this goal..." He took a shallow gulp to blurt out his next desperate sentence. "If you still hold any love for her, fight back!"

Robin blinked. He looked at Chrom struggling for breath and his own hand choking him as his eyes filled with fear and horror. "C...Chrom?" he stuttered, grip relaxing. "I...I..." He winced in agony as lines of pain etched across his face. "L...Lucina... I'm sor..." He screamed out, unable to bear it anymore, and his grip on Chrom tightened.

"R...Robin... C...Come... back..." Chrom pleaded.

"*I. Am not. Robin!*" the man furiously yelled back. "Robin is *dead!* He died with his wife! I...I..." His eyes slowly began to gleam a dull red, shining through the shadow of his cowl. "I... am the breath of ruin... I am the wings of despair... I am the Fell Dragon, Grima..."

With a flick of his wrist, he summoned another lightning dagger in his hand and with it he stabbed Chrom in the lower torso. Releasing his grip, he dropped Chrom's body to the ground and stood over it victoriously. "Hahahaha..." he laughed, stretching his limbs. "It's been so long since I had a body..." Grima turned and raised his hand towards the barrier that divided the room, making it evaporate into thin air. "My Grimleal! Leave me to welcome my guests..."

All the Grimleal in the altar stopped fighting immediately and bowed sharply, uttering, "Yes Lord Grima," before scuttling away into the shadows like insects and disappearing down hidden staircases.

Grima strode forward a few steps and held his arms out wide in a welcoming pose. "Greetings, Ylisseans. I am Grima, the Fell Dragon of legend. It's such a pleasure to finally meet you all." He scanned through the Shepherds' ranks and grinned. "Well, well... It appears I've already met some of you before. Come out, children from the future... I believe I was

about to kill you before Naga helped you elude me, but you can't hide from me for long, not even across the vast realm of time! We have so much catching up to do..."

"Y...You!" Severa growled as she inched closer to her mother, trying not to show her fear. "W...What did you do to Robin?"

"Robin's soul is under *my* lock and key. He's as good as dead," Grima laughed. "/ control this body now, and this time, I won't make the same mistake that I did before... Now that Chrom is dead, only a few members of the Exalted bloodline remain, and I won't toy with them anymore by letting them live. Speaking of the Exalted bloodline..." He glanced around the room more thoroughly, as if he had missed something the first time around. "Where is Lucina? She and I have some... unfinished business to take care of..."

"Y...Your Risen killed her, y...you monster!" Sumia stammered. "Just like you k...killed my husband!" She was so overwhelmed with grief from having lost both Lucina and now Chrom in less than an hour that she couldn't even cry.

"Oh?" Grima cocked his head, looking disappointed. "What a shame... I was looking forward to personally ripping her pretty little head off her body in the most painful manner possible, but what's done is done now. She's dead, and that's all that matters."

Suddenly, Grima winced and doubled over, shouting out before speaking in a voice that sounded much more like the Shepherds' tactician. "No! I won't allow you to say th-" His mouth clamped shut and Grima shook his head, looking a little disoriented before recovering his senses.

"Excuse that... interruption. I'm still getting used to my new body. Now where were we? Oh yes, wiping out the Exalted bloodline. I wonder what would be more amusing... Do I kill off the parents or the children first?" he asked, not expecting an answer. He chuckled as he thought, face twisting with a sinister grin. "Wouldn't it be enjoyable, children from the future? To have come so far and fought so hard... To have found your lost parents, only to watch them die again?" He paused, allowing his statement to sink in. "Or maybe I should kill the children first this time around. I would very much like watching their parents see them die. Both these worms that escaped me once... as well as the little ones of this world..."

"No!" Sumia shouted. She guided her pegasus in front of Cynthia defensively and held her lance poised to attack, shaking in an anger that she had never experienced before. "I won't allow you to touch my daughter! I might not be the strongest or the deftest, but I'll make you pay for what you did to my family! Chrom, Lucina, and now Robin! He was my daughter's husband and my son-in-law, and as their mother I vow to avenge their lives!"

"M...Mother!" Cynthia stammered. "My hero..."

"You won't take *my* daughter without a fight either!" Cordelia declared as she stepped in front of Severa.

"Y...You can't fight him, Mother!" Severa cried. "He's t...too strong!"

"I have a duty as both a pegasus knight and a mother," Cordelia responded with determination. "I'll defend you until the end!"

One by one the parents stepped forward to protect their future children, following Sumia's example.

"No one is laying a finger on my son if I have anything to say about it," Maribelle stepped forward confidently.

"You can't fight, Ma..."

"First of all, it would be more proper to say, 'You can't fight, *Mother*,' don't you agree?" she smiled, twirling her parasol in between her fingers. "It's rather barbaric, but I'm not afraid to bash a couple heads in to keep my darling son safe."

"Aww, Ma..." Brady sniffed.

"Minerva and I won't let you touch our dear Jerome," Cherche warned. "Isn't that right, Minerva?" The wyvern snarled in agreement, and then roared menacingly at Grima.

"Mother..." Jerome's emotions were unclear, but not even his mask could hide the fact that he was touched.

"A taguel mother will defend her kit until the bitter end!" Panne growled.

"B...But can it not be the bitter end?" Yarne stammered. "I...I can't be the last one again, Mother..."

"You have nothing to fear, my son," she reassured. "For I have no intention of losing!"

"You mess with my kid? You mess with me!" Sully huffed.

"But Mother, this is..." Kjelle began before being interrupted.

"What? Your fight?" her mother grinned. "Sorry kid, but I'm fighting with ya whether you like it or not!"

"I'll never let you hurt Inigo again!" Olivia shouted, face red with anger.

"Guh... Mother... I appreciate your support, but that was very loud..." Inigo blushed. "N...Now everyone's looking at us..."

"W...What?" she looked horrified, voice losing strength. "I didn't mean... Ahh... S...Someone else say something..."

"I wonder... Will my curses work on a god? I might need to come up with even worse ones for you..." Tharja wondered. "Noire already has enough to worry about without you threatening her."

"T...Thank you, Mother," Noire peeped. "I think..."

"I will no longer permit you to inflict harm upon my offspring," Miriel added, adjusting her glasses.

"But the probability of success against Grima's wrath is obscenely low, even for you, Mother..." Laurent frowned with concern.

"It is a chance I am willing to take for you." She gave a rare smile.

"I'll keep you safe, Owain!" Lissa declared. She was trying to both sound as protective as the other mothers while trying to keep Morgan from seeing Grima in her father's body.

"M...Mother... You can't use a weapon! Grima will kill you again..." Owain protested, sword hand dropping to his side.

"Ugh... Details, details... I'll help from the sidelines then, as boring as that sounds..." she huffed in response.

"And don't forget Nowi!" the manakete shouted enthusiastically. "I'll keep you safe, Nah!"

"I don't think you realize how strong Grima is, Mother..." Nah winced.

"Hey! Don't worry!" Nowi smirked. "Your mother's a dragon! No one can beat me!"

"But you haven't seen Grima's dragon form yet..."

"Oh!" Grima exclaimed. "That reminds me. I had almost forgotten that I still needed to assume my true form after you pathetic mortals kept blabbering on and on about your noble, touching, and *incredibly* stupid and hollow threats. But all of the Gemstones are not yet embedded in the Fire Emblem..."

As if on cue, Basilio and Flavia burst into the room, followed by the Feroxi army. "Chrom!" Basilio yelled. "We're here! All hell is loose outsi..." He paused, immediately realizing what was happening. "Damn it..."

"What a surprise!" the Fell Dragon cried almost gleefully. "More little pigs have come to the slaughter! The Fire Emblem may not have the rest of its Gemstones, but *you* do, Feroxi fool..."

Grima's eyes flashed from underneath his cowl, and he raised his hand towards the Fire Emblem. As he closed his fingers into a fist, the four false Gemstones on it shattered into pieces. He swiped his other hand through the air, and the real Gemstones that Basilio carried in a small pouch around his waist flew out and snapped into place. Once fitted in the Emblem, the five Gemstones together began to smoke and glow with power.

The Fell Dragon grinned as the statue above the Fire Emblem glowed an intense purple color. "You all must have thought you were quite clever. I appreciate you bringing the Gemstones straight to me... You have lost... And I just seem to be forgetting one *teensy* little thing again... It must be this body. Robin was never much for remembering things, hahaha..." He raised his voice, bellowing out into the Shepherds. "Morgan! Come to your... *father*..."

"Daddy?" Morgan asked, trying to see him over the crowd. "Is that you, Daddy? Where are you? Let me go, Auntie Lissa!"

Lissa desperately tried to cover her eyes and hold her where she couldn't see, but the girl squirmed out of her grasp and made a beeline towards Grima. "Someone stop her!" Lissa cried out. "Don't let Grima get her!"

No one was able to stop her for a while. She was on a mission to see her father after he had been gone for what seemed like a lifetime to her. Using her small size to her advantage, Morgan darted in between and under legs to evade

all the Shepherds attempting to grab her. "I'm coming, Daddy!"

"Morgan!" Sumia shouted when the girl reached the very front lines. "Don't!" She reached out to grab her collar, only to trip over Morgan's small feet as she scampered by. The loud thud that she made when she landed made Morgan stop and turn around.

"Are you okay, Grandmother?" she asked innocently. "Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine..." Sumia attempted to recollect herself. "Just stay here with me, love. Don't go!"

"But... but..." Morgan looked from her grandmother to her "father's" outstretched hand, feeling conflicted. "Mommy and Daddy always say that I need to be a good girl and listen to them... Daddy wants me to come... and I want to see Daddy..."

"Just don't go, love!" Sumia begged as she stood up, reaching for her again. "Stay here!"

"Morgan..." Grima's voice urged. "Who wants your *father* to give you a hug?"

The girl's face brightened and she raised her hand excitedly. "I want a hug, Daddy! Me me me!" She slipped out of Sumia's grasp and ran as fast as her legs could manage, holding her arms outstretched. Right before she could reach his fingertips, Grima waved his hand and she vanished with a shout and a burst of light.

"What do you do to her?!" Sumia screamed in anger.

"Oh, I teleported her somewhere else," the Fell Dragon responded, sinister smile on his face. "I'm in a good mood today, so I decided to spare her the carnage about to take place. It would be bad for my reputation with her for now if she saw me kill you all... Her *father* needs to remain a hero, gyahaha!" He held up his right hand, and the glowing statue fired a beam of energy directly at him, shrouding him in purple light. "Goodbye, Shepherds of Ylisse! My true form will be the last thing you ever see!" Grima vanished, and the Dragon's Table began shaking severely.

"We have to go! Now!" Sumia shouted.

She and the rest of the Shepherds rushed outside the structure only to see the Fell Dragon's monstrous form looming over them, six eyes blazing holes through the stormy clouds. The memory faded with Grima's earth-shaking roar.

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"Unlike this timeline," Naga began. "Grima prevailed over Robin... With the death of his wife at what he assumed to be his hands, he could no longer continue living... Once he was convinced that he was the one who killed her, Robin... surrendered."

Lucina turned to Robin in concern, knowing that the memories must have been difficult for him to watch. His eyes were fixed with horror to where the scene in front of him had faded, and his hands were quivering uncontrollably. Without averting his gaze, he started to reach around blindly for Lucina's hand to make sure that she was still there standing beside him. Lucina guided his hand into hers, which he clutched onto so tightly that his own knuckles turned white.

"With her mother's death and her father's defeat by Grima, Morgan was left essentially an orphan, although she still held the assumption that both of her parents were very much alive..."

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Morgan opened her eyes. She didn't know what had happened. One second she was with her father, and then there was a burst of bright light, and now she was... somewhere else... It took some time for her vision to adjust from the flash, but even when it did return to normal, she still couldn't tell where she was. She was in a room, but it didn't look like hers at all.

She shared *her* room, or more like her tent, with her parents. There were always books and maps everywhere, usually on the desk but sometimes strewn across the floor or on top of her mother's chest where she kept some special belongings. Her own little bed was always right next to her parents' larger one, but she rarely used it. She preferred squeezing in between her mother and father to fall asleep every night. Morgan felt much more comfortable and safe with them right next to her, and they never complained about her being there. Her father liked "sleep hugs" as Morgan called them, and every night he would subconsciously find some way or another to scoop up both her and her mother, so she would wake up most mornings cradled in his arms. Then she would squeeze her father back or play with her mother's

hair in bed until they woke.

This room was nothing like hers; it was small and orderly but rather barren. There was an old-looking bed with purple sheets on one wall and a tall dresser filled with books on the opposing side. Morgan cautiously stepped closer and pulled open one of the drawers below the dresser a crack. There was a stack of blank paper inside as well as a jar that held various colored sticks of wax, presumably for writing or drawing. She peered inside another drawer to find a few dusty toys presumably meant for a small baby. Besides a floor rug emblazoned with a scary looking symbol and a tiny window too high up on the wall for her to see out of, the room was otherwise empty.

Morgan walked over to the only door, and if she stood on the tips of her toes she could reach the handle. She pulled down hard, but the handle didn't budge. She tried again with no success. It was locked.

She decided to call her parents to get her. They always came when she called. She laid down and pressed her cheek against the rug right in front of the door and yelled out.

"Father!" she cried. "Fa-ther!" Hurriedly she turned her head to press her ear up against the door and wait until he called her name back. No answer. Maybe he just couldn't hear her.

"Mother!" she called. She didn't know where her mother had gone either. Auntie Lissa hadn't answered when she asked where her mother was. "Mo-ther! It's Morgan!" She listened against the door for a response that didn't come.

"Father! Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"Mother! Please come!"

Silence.

She started to panic. She was alone in some unfamiliar place without her parents. There were no legs to hide behind, hands to hold, or arms to jump into. She kept trying, raising her voice so that they were sure to hear her.

"Daddy! Help me!"

Silence.

"Mommy! Come fast!"

She lifted her head up to press her ear against the door too fast and hit the side of her head hard on the wood. She started to tear in the corners of her eyes and called out again.

"M...Mommy! I got h...hurt!" she whimpered. "C...Can I have kisses?"

Silence.

Morgan didn't understand. Her mother always came when she got hurt. Always, *a/ways*. She would drop whatever she was doing and come rushing over to her, no matter how small the injury, to bandage her up and kiss her until she felt better. ...But this time she wasn't coming.

"W...Where are you, Mommy?" she asked. "Come! P...Please?" She listened long and hard for a response, and when it didn't come, she started to cry. The few tears escalated into full-on sobbing the longer she waited. "I...I'm scared, Mama! I w...want to go h...home! Mama!"

Morgan stood up shakily and searched the bed in vain for her favorite blanket. It was blue with her mother's Brand on the front. It was soft and smelled nice, and it always made her feel a little better when she was sad. The blanket was nowhere to be found, and the sheets that *were* on the bed were dusty and scratchy. Morgan didn't want any of them, so she sat empty handed in the corner of the room facing the door in hopes that her mother would find her any minute. She hugged her knees to her chest and waited. She waited a very long time.

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Morgan awoke from a sleepless night in the corner to the sounds of footsteps outside her door. Could it be? She

hurriedly stood up and anxiously waited as the sounds became louder and louder. The door handle clicked as it was unlocked from the outside and turned.

Morgan's face lit up. "Daddy!" she cried excitedly. "Daddy! Daddy!" She ran across the room and hugged his leg tightly. "I missed you, Daddy..."

Grima looked down on her and scowled. "Let go of me, child," he hissed, trying to shake her off.

The girl thought he was just playing with her, so she held on to his leg tightly. "You're silly, Daddy!" she giggled.

Eventually Grima resorted to prying her off with his hands. "I said let go of me, child!" he snarled, shoving her back inside the room. "And *do not* call me Daddy."

Morgan stumbled, catching herself before she fell backwards. She looked up sadly into his hooded face, hurt by his harsh tone. "But, Father... Don't you love hugs?"

"No."

Morgan frowned. "Oh..." Was she in trouble? Did she do something wrong? Her father never denied one of her hugs before. And where was her mother? She was always at her father's side. "Can we go home, Father? I want to see Mommy."

He cringed at her last word, as if it had physically harmed him to hear her say it. "This is home, Morgan," he responded. "Our new home."

"But I liked our old home, Father..." she told him. "Can you take me back?"

"No. I was only coming to check on you," he spoke. "Guard!"

A scary looking man emerged from the shadows outside her door and bowed. "Yes, Lord Grima?"

"Stay here and don't let her leave," Grima commanded. "Bring her meals when necessary." He clenched his teeth, leaning in closer to the man. "And if you harm her in anyway, I'll have your head."

"A...As you command, my lord," the man bowed quickly, knowing well that Grima wasn't bluffing. "I will do as you ask."

"Good. I will return later tonight." Grima turned to leave, but Morgan caught him by the end of his coat.

"Don't leave without me, Father!" she begged. "I want to come with you!"

Grima pulled the coat out of her hands. "You are to stay here until I decide what to do with you, understand?"

"But..."

"*Understand?*"

Morgan snapped her mouth shut, looking down at the floor. She didn't know how to react. Her father had never been this harsh on her. The door closed and the lock clicked before she looked back up, and she was trapped inside alone again.

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"Mama!" she sobbed out loud, unable to take the crushing loneliness of the day anymore. Her father had said he would be back after sunset, and it was only noon at the latest. She wanted him back dearly, but she desperately needed to see her mother's face again. "Mama! I m...miss you! Please come!" Still her mother didn't come, and all Morgan could hear was the guard outside her door grumbling about how loud her cries were. "M...Mama... Come back..."

She cried for her mother until she had no more tears left to cry out. Her throat was hurting after so much shouting, so she fell silent to help it recover. In the meantime, she needed something to do. She opened one of the drawers of the dresser and delicately removed a single sheet of paper and the colored wax sticks. Moving the rug slightly and placing the paper down on the hard floor underneath, Morgan decided to draw her mother a picture.

Taking one of the wax sticks in her hand, she began to draw as best as she possibly could. It took quite a while, for she

had to restart a few times, but finally she could admire the fruit of her labor. It was a picture of herself and her mother holding hands with big smiles on their faces. They were under a bright sunny sky and standing in a flower patch. Her mother loved flowers, especially the daisies her father found her all the time, so she did her best to draw those exact ones. On the top, she wrote in her best handwriting, "I miss you, Mommy," and at the bottom she wrote, "Love, Morgan." She held the picture out in front of her and smiled. This was sure to make her mother come back. Now all she had to do was wait for her father...

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Just like before, the door clicked and swung open, and sure enough her father was standing in the doorway. He looked like he had cleaned himself up since Morgan had last seen him. His clothes used to be all dirty, especially his favorite coat; it had been red on the sleeves. She couldn't figure out what had made it red in the first place, but it had since been cleaned off.

"Father!" Morgan stood up and ran over to him, drawing held behind her back. She couldn't wait to show him. "Guess what I made! Ta da!" She held the paper out so he could see. "I drew a picture for Mommy! Do you like it?"

He stared at the picture for a while, not saying a word.

"Can we give this picture to Mommy, Father? In a letter? So then, when Mommy sees it, she'll remember to come home and see me!" Morgan exclaimed excitedly, hugging her sides. "And then, when she comes home, I can say 'I love you, Mommy!' and she'll say, 'I love you so, so much, Morgan!' like Mommy always says! And *then* she'll give me lots of hugs and kisses!"

For a moment, Grima looked like he was about to burst into tears, but before he did, he swatted the drawing out of her hands. It fell to the ground and got a little crumpled in the process. Morgan yelped and fell to her knees, scrambling to pick up her perfect picture and smooth the creases in it as best as she could.

"F...Father!" she sniffed. "Why did you hit my drawing for Mommy?"

"Because!" he shouted in response as he hid his face from her, tone a mixture of sadness and anger. "She'll n...never see it!"

"Why? I made it for her!"

"Because your mother is gone, Morgan!"

She blinked. His words didn't make any sense. "When will she come back?"

"Y...Your mother is gone!" he repeated, voice growing small. "A...And she's never coming back..."

"N...Never?" Morgan stammered.

"Never!"

"W...Why? Mommy l...loves me! Mommy wouldn't leave..." She shook her head, unable to believe it.

"Your mother doesn't love you! She abandoned you, Morgan! She abandoned us!" the man hissed, rage from earlier this morning filling his voice again. "Her and all the Shepherds! They turned against us! I'm trying to protect you from them!"

Morgan clutched her drawing tightly her chest, shaking her head even faster. "No, no, no, no..." she repeated. It couldn't be true. "Mommy loves me... I know it!"

"Then why isn't she coming back?" Grima asked maliciously.

Morgan was silent, then started to cry. It couldn't be true. It just couldn't.

A few times the man reached out as if he was going to console her, but he stopped every time and withdrew his hands. The force to comfort her was fighting the force to leave her, and it seemed like the latter was winning.

"I'll return in the morning," he said at last, turning to leave. "Go to sleep."

"N...No, Daddy!" the girl sobbed. "Stay with me! S...Stay!"

"Quiet!" he shushed to no avail.

"D...Don't go, Daddy! Don't leave me!"

Grima couldn't get her to stop, and eventually he groaned and began to slip off his coat. "Here!" he declared, holding it out for her to take. "Will this remind you of me being here?"

Morgan rubbed her eyes with one hand, holding her drawing in the other, and took a long look at the coat. It was her father's favorite. She hardly saw him without it. She reached out cautiously and took it from him to examine. "B...But this is your coat..."

"This one has a filthy stain on it," Grima scoffed, gesturing towards the tea stain on the lower right. "I can get another." He looked like he was already tired of the conversation. "Are you fine?"

Morgan didn't answer, which he took as a yes.

"I'll return tomorrow morning," he repeated, walking out and closing the door again.

Morgan stood where she was in front of the door for a while, turning the coat over and over in her hands. She decided to lay it out on the floor, and then carefully slipped her precious drawing into one of the secret pockets on the inside of the coat. It would be safe there. Then she picked the coat back up and slid her arms into the sleeves. It was far too big for her and she had to roll the sleeves up considerably so that her hands poked out the other ends, but it was familiar and comfortable. Wrapping herself up in it, she felt a little safer, almost as if her father was there and giving her a long hug. She walked over to the bed, almost tripping on the oversized coat that trailed behind her like a cape on the way, and removed the pillow, placing it on the ground in the corner. She rested her head against it, using her father's coat as a blanket. Sleep overtook her very slowly, and she finally drifted off with her mother's picture close to her heart.

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As the scene faded, Morgan slowly reached inside the coat she wore. Her fingertips touched an old piece of crumpled paper inside the very same pocket that she hadn't even known had existed, and with shaking hands she pulled it out carefully and unfolded it. The page had a few tiny tears on the edges and a few parts of the image were smudged slightly after being pressed up together for so long, but the picture was unmistakable. Sure enough, it was a girl holding hands with her mother. Both had brilliant blue hair, and the writing that floated around them was that of a small child's. It read, "I miss you, Mommy. Love, Morgan." The girl's fingers slowly tightened around the page and her head bowed slightly as the memory of the drawing's creation came rushing back unrelentingly.

"It was at this time..." Naga explained sadly. "That Grima began to seed lies in Morgan's young mind. Each day that went by that Lucina didn't return only served as more ammunition for the Fell Dragon's manipulation. Not once did he tell her that her mother had perished fighting for her. Grima said that her mother had left her, that she didn't love her anymore, and that she and the Shepherds were the ones who had lied to her all her life and were now her enemies..." Naga waved her hand, and image after image of young Morgan sitting in that same room flashed by. She looked slightly older in each image, slowly growing into her father's coat, and it was clear from her face that she was losing hope. "Grima's influence over the mind is a... powerful thing, as I am sure you have experienced, Fellblood." Robin gulped and nodded. "But his mind control can take other forms than the one you have experienced... With you, he attempted to forcibly enter and take full control over your mind, causing you a great deal of tangible pain. Grima never possessed Morgan directly in this way. His method of manipulation was perhaps even more painful to her in particular. He broke down a girl who had been surrounded by love all of her life by slowly convincing her that all the love she had known was a lie. Even though she refused to listen at first, as time dragged on and the world became more desolate, she began to believe him. Morgan desperately yearned for affection during her young years, and thus she turned to the only person she thought still cared for her: the Fell Dragon masquerading as her father. Grima himself soon discovered that the child could be exploited for his own personal gain, as her desperate desire to earn his love led her to follow in his every footsteps. Unknowingly, the child grew up as the Fell Dragon's personal servant..."

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"Father!" Morgan called, running down the halls of Plegia Castle. She looked like a young teenager now, only slightly younger than she looked in the present time. Her arm had a sizable cut and she held an Elthunder tome clutched in one hand, having just arrived back from a battlefield. She found the man walking down a separate hall, and she hurried to catch up with him. "Fa-"

Grima turned to face her, eyes vicious and scolding.

"I...I mean... Lord Grima..." Morgan stammered, releasing her mistake of calling him "Father" again. "I...I've returned from my first mission for you..." Grima said nothing. "I got a little hurt," she added after a while, gesturing at her arm. She was secretly hoping that her father would have noticed and been concerned about her, but she knew it was wishful thinking. "I'm okay though... It isn't too bad..."

"Did you kill the Shepherds who had taken refuge in the town, Morgan?" Grima asked, not caring about her wound at all. "According to my spies, there were five all together."

Morgan smiled, thinking that she had done well. "My troops killed two, and I confirmed their deaths. They were two of the Shepherds who you said would be there. I hope you're proud for my very first battle, Fa- Lord Grima!"

Grima looked unimpressed. "And the other three?" he hissed, rage already building.

"Umm... Well..." Morgan looked down, afraid that he would mention it. "They... e...escaped..."

"*Escaped?*" Grima yelled, red eyes gleaming under the cowl of the new coat he had obtained. He rose to full height, towering over the small girl. "How. Did they. Escape. Morgan?"

"T...They s...split up their armies and fled through the buildings, my lord!" Morgan stammered. "I...If I divided my troops as well to go after them, it was highly possible that I could have lost over half my soldiers! The buildings would have provided cover for the enemy army to execute counterattacks against my smaller regiments! I...let them escape to minimize my casualties as best as possible..."

"You miserable child..." Grima growled, clenching his fists. "I thought I had taught you better than *this* pathetic display! I've told you before, Morgan! Our soldiers are already dead! We can make more! Each enemy you kill, we gain another Risen! How many times do I have to drill this through your thick skull?!"

"B...But I...I used the battle strategies y...you taught me when I was little, Lord Grima! You s...said it hurts to lose a comrade, s...so I tried to keep as many as I could alive!"

"*I don't care about them!*" Grima bellowed. "I want the Shepherds dead! All of them! If you'll lose half your soldiers to kill one of them, do it! I have thousands of Risen at my command! Hundreds of thousands! Millions! Wipe. The Shepherds. Out!" He ripped an Elfire tome out of a Grimleal guard's hands. "If they try to escape through buildings, burn the buildings down! Fire destroys!" Grima threw Morgan's Elthunder tome violently on the ground and replaced it with the Elfire tome. "Do whatever it takes to destroy them! Do you understand?!" He raised his arm high into the air with an open palm, poised to strike her.

Morgan cowered and closed her eyes to brace herself against the blow she was about to receive. "I...I understand! I understand!" she whimpered.

Grima brought his hand down, but he stopped before reaching Morgan's face. He gritted his teeth and attempted to move his hand, but it was as if he was being stopped by some other force. He made one more attempt to slap the girl before giving up and turning his back on her.

"T...Thank you for sparing me, Lord Grima!" Morgan hurriedly bowed in relief and scrambled to regain her composure.

Grima was silent for a moment before responding with a warning. "Do not make me regret my choice of placing you as my personal tactician, child. I trust you will not fail me again."

"Of course not, my lord," Morgan bowed again. "I...I will heed your words and change my tactics immediately! I'll be sure to make you proud!"

Grima scoffed and walked down the hall, leaving her with the feeling of failure.

...

"So Grima... wasn't... lying..." Chrom realized. "About Morgan serving him..."

"Not entirely," Naga spoke. "But the girl had been deceived. She was unaware that Grima was using her solely to eliminate your army. Morgan was still under the assumption that the Fell Dragon in her father's body was her true father."

"But wouldn't Grima's personality throw her off?" Chrom asked. "Robin would never be that violent or mean towards anyone, especially not his own daughter."

"The girl thought that the change in personality was her own fault. She thought she had disappointed him in some way or

done something to anger him, so she was desperate to make him proud of her. Knowing of her father's legendary reputation as a tactician, she surmised that if she could match his skills, he would be more accepting of her. When Grima assigned her with the task of destroying the Shepherds, she saw it as a great opportunity to prove herself and her abilities."

"Naga..." Lucina asked quietly. "I've seen Grima's brutality firsthand, so I know how violent he can be... He would kill even his highest ranking Grimleal if they did anything to displease him without a second thought... but he couldn't touch Morgan at all..."

"Ah. You are correct. The Fell Dragon would never show that kind of restraint, but it was not he who was restraining himself. This was perhaps Grima's greatest mistake of the timeline: he severely underestimated the strength of the man who used to control his body and his determination to carry out his wife's final request," Naga explained, nodding her head towards Robin. "In his arrogance, Grima assumed that Robin's soul had been killed when he ripped it apart and that he had total control over his body. Robin still clung to existence however, and his emotions and thoughts would occasionally supersede those of Grima's. This moment was one of them; it was Robin's willpower that prevented Grima from striking Morgan. Tell me... When Grima appeared to you in the Dragon's Table, did anything about his appearance strike you as odd?"

"Well, he walked with a limp, and he couldn't hold up his head either..." Lucina recalled.

"Those were also Robin's doing," Naga nodded. "Throughout the years, Robin continued to battle Grima to expel his spirit with every ounce of strength he had left, and his persistence gradually weakened the Fell Dragon's hold over him. This made Grima lose control over parts of Robin's body. Grima refused to accept this at first, but eventually he realized that Robin's attacks were making him vulnerable and that he could potentially be forced out of Robin's body entirely. Grima's life force requires a vessel to keep it tethered to this tangible world, so if he lost control of Robin's body, he would become nothing more than a lost spirit until he found another host suitable to sustain him. He needed to find another vessel that possessed his Fell Blood as a precaution, and with Validar's death, the person with the greatest concentration of his blood was..."

"Me..." Morgan spoke quietly.

"Correct. Although you possessed my own blood as well from your mother and you were not as ideal of a choice as your father for this reason, you had enough purified Fell Blood to serve as a host for Grima's spirit. In preparation, Grima established a link between Morgan and her father that connected their feelings and sensations to make his spirit's transfer from Robin's to Morgan's body easier. Robin soon became aware of Grima's plan however, which prompted him to take a last resort to save his daughter..."

...

"Yisstol is nearing complete destruction, Lord Grima," Morgan informed him as they walked down the hall. "It should only be a matter of a few days until the last members of the Exalted bloodline are wiped out."

"Good..." Grima murmured, struggling to walk with his incapacitated leg. "Soon no one will stand in my way, and the world will be mine... And once Yisstol falls, I will bestow the highest honor that I can give upon you, Morgan. You will have made your *father* very proud."

Morgan perked up at the words. "Really? The highest honor? I'll be sure to work twice as hard for you then, Lord Grima! Anything for you!"

Grima cringed, as if the words were painful to hear. "Hgh..." he groaned suddenly, stopping in his tracks and holding his head in both hands.

"Lord Grima!" Morgan cried, rushing back to him in concern. "A...Are you alright?"

"...You!" Grima hissed as he doubled over, not to Morgan but to someone else entirely. "I... killed you!" He shouted out in pain and closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, they weren't gleaming red but warm brown, the same color of Morgan's eyes.

"Morgan!" he cried, grabbing her by the arms and holding her tightly.

"Lord Grima!" Morgan shouted, taken off guard. "What are you doing? What happened to your voice?"

"No! Not Grima! Your father!" Robin spoke desperately. "Your real father!"

"Who are you?!" the girl shouted, trying to writh out of his grip. "What did you do to Lord Grima?"

Robin held her tighter so that she couldn't break free. "I don't know what he's told you, but please remember! Grima isn't your father! Don't you recognize my voice?"

"Lord Grima taught me everything I know!" Morgan protested. "Let go of me!"

"Morgan, my baby girl... Please... I don't have much time! I...I can't fight him for much longer..." Robin pleaded. "What he told you were lies! You have to remember your life before he stole you away from me like he stole your mother..."

"My mother was a deceitful villain!" Morgan shouted angrily. "She never loved me! She tried to prevent my Lord Grima from creating the perfect world!"

Robin was tearing at her words. "No, no, no... Your mother loved you, Morgan... She loved you... so, so much... She wanted me to tell you, but I never got the chance... because I wasn't strong enough to protect you in the first place... You have to believe me..."

"I don't want to hear your lies, body-stealer!" the girl protested.

"Grima is the body-stealer, Morgan!" Robin cried. "He took mine and he's going to take yours any day!"

"If it's the highest honor that he can bestow upon me, I would gladly sacrifice my body so that Lord Grima can create a new world in his own image!"

"No... You can't... believe that..." the man winced. "I can't... hold him off for long... You have to leave, Morgan! Leave while you still have a chance! I c...can't fail your mother again... I can't let him take you too..."

"Return Lord Grima to me!" Morgan shouted, pounding on his chest with her fists.

"...I'm sorry about this, Morgan..." Robin whimpered as he pressed his thumbs to her forehead. "I don't have another choice..."

"What are you doing to me?!" The girl tried to thrash out of his grip, but Robin refused to let go.

Robin closed his eyes and pressed down on Morgan's temples, looking incredibly focused but exhausted. The girl's thrashing slowed to a stop, and her brown eyes glossed over slightly, staring blankly into the distance. "Naga!" Robin shouted as loud as he could. "Wherever you are, hear my plea! I know the sins I've committed are unforgiveable, but I ask you as a desperate father! Please save my daughter! She's been deceived, and I can't let Grima take her life! I've purified her memories as much as I could! Take her to a better place! Take her to a place where she has a chance to have a happy ending! Take her to her mother!"

The air in front of him began to shimmer and distort, and the very fabric of space in the area was suddenly torn open to create a glowing portal to another world.

"Thank you..." Robin looked up, tears running down his smiling face. "Thank you..." He pulled Morgan into a final embrace, and it was like saying goodbye to Lucina all over again. "I'm sorry... that I let all of this happen to you, baby girl..." he sniffed. "Y...You never deserved any of this... I've been a terrible father... This is all I can do for you now... M...Maybe someday, if you ever remember your old dad... you can find it in your beautiful heart... to forgive me... You... were and always will be... your mother and I's greatest joy... and I hope... you can find happiness... wherever you go... I'll love you forever, Morgan..." He delicately kissed her forehead, and then pushed her away into the rip in time. Grima regained control only to see both Morgan and the portal disappear before his gleaming red eyes.

...

"Robin locked away Morgan's memories... to save her..." Naga explained as the scene faded. "While he does not physically possess this power, Grima does. As their minds and souls were merged, Robin could use this power as his own when he reassumed control over his body. He also broke apart the link he shared with her as much as he could so it would be harder for Grima to find her across time." She paused to give Morgan some time. "There is one more thing you should know... Robin did not want you to forget your mother. In truth, your mother was all that he wanted you to remember, but all of the memories you knew of her at the time were so corrupted by Grima's lies that Robin couldn't save them. Your memories of him were less tainted, so he left some of those intact only so you could identify who your family was when you arrived in the past..." Naga sighed deeply, voice softening. "I have told you all I know about your future past now... The question that remains, child of the dual bloodlines, is what you plan to make of your future present..."

Morgan was shaking as she watched the final piece of her puzzle fall into place. She held her head in one trembling hand, still clinging to her drawing with the other. And then the pain stopped. And she opened her eyes for the first time since Grima had whispered his first lie to her. "The seal... is broken..." she spoke. "I...I remember... I remember everything..." The tear that escaped her eye got caught in her budding smile. "N...Now I know... who they were... My parents... loved me until the very end..." She turned around, gaze focused on only two people in particular. "My parents... are you guys..."

She started to run faster than she ever had. "Mama!" she cried over and over, sobbing with joyous tears as she ran into Lucina's open arms. She wrapped her arms around her mother's back and buried her face into her chest and wanted to stay there forever. "I missed you, Mama!" she wailed. "I missed you! Never leave me again!"

"Shh..." Lucina stroked the back of her head. "Mommy's here now..."

"I'm sorry about all those bad things I said!" Morgan wept. "I love you!"

"I love you so, so much, Morgan," Lucina smiled.

Morgan froze for a second at the words, and then burst into more sobs. "Y...You always used to say that to me! It made me feel like the most special girl in the world, that you loved me more than anyone else ever could..."

"Of course you're special. You're my one and only daughter, aren't you?"

"I...I made this for you, Mama!" Morgan held up her drawing from years past. "I worked as hard as I could to make it the best it could b...be for you! I wanted to give it to you so bad... but you never came back... I never saw you again..."

"I love it, sweetie," Lucina told her, gingerly taking the drawing. "I'll treasure it forever."

"I knew it! I knew my mother loved me and still does!" Morgan laughed joyously. "Remember all those things I said I wished I remembered about you? Like if you played with me, or bandaged me up when I got hurt, or tucked me in at night? I remember all of those things now! I remember you!"

"Oh, I'm so glad, Morgan," Lucina smiled wide. "I'm sorry that I left you alone in your future... I should have fought harder for you..."

"It wasn't your fault, Mother," the girl reassured, finding comfort in her mother's shoulder. "You fought for me, and that's all I wanted to know." She gave Lucina another squeeze before letting go, apologetic smile on her lips. "Sorry, Mother... I know you're not the most touchy-feely person... I just... needed that..."

"Anything for my baby girl." Lucina leaned closer to her and kissed her on her forehead. "You can have as many hugs as you want."

"Thanks, Mom," she grinned, and then turned to look over her shoulder. "Father..."

Robin gave a thin smile, gaze shifting down to the floor. "Some dad I turned out to be..." he laughed uneasily. "I wish I could have been more of the hero you thought I was... All I did was... lie to you, send you through hell, and take away the life with your mother that you deserved... I'm sorry, Morgan..." He tried to keep smiling, but he was on the verge of crying. "I really messed things up, huh?"

"You're still my hero, Dad..." Morgan spoke, collapsing into his arms. "You didn't mean for any of those things to happen. I remember you from when I was little. You were so fun and nice and always happy to teach me something new."

"I was so awful to you..." he protested. "How could I have let those things happen to you as a right-minded father? How could I have let Grima overpower me when I had a daughter who needed me?"

"But you never stopped fighting him, Dad. And in the end, you saved me from him and erased the lies that he had convinced me were truths."

"I'll try to do better, kiddo," Robin sniffed. "This time around I'll try to make up for the things I... I mean, your real father... couldn't give you..."

"But you *are* my real father, Dad," the girl corrected, nuzzling her face into his chest. "And I couldn't be happier that I have the best father in the world. It was Grima who took you from me. Both of you from me! When I get ahold of him, I'm gonna... I'm gonna..." Morgan slipped out of Robin's grip and clenched her fists. "Well... I don't know what I'm going to do to him yet... but he's going to pay for taking *this* princess tactician's mom and dad away!" She reached into her coat and pulled out the very same Elfire tome that Grima had given her. "And from here on out, I'm going to use lightning magic,

just like my *father* taught me!" With a shout, she threw the tome to the ground, looking rather satisfied with herself. She poised her leg to stomp on it before she stopped herself mid-strike. "Oh! Wait! Tomes are valuable, even if Grima gave this one to me..." She bent down to pick it up and stuff it back inside her coat. "I'll take it back to camp," she huffed. "And then I'll throw it into the crate of tomes we have. Very angrily!"

"Thank you, Naga," Chrom spoke after a while. "Not only have you granted us your power, but it looks like you just made a family whole again."

"It is my pleasure," Naga smiled. "I feel obliged to right Grima's villainy in any way I am able."

"And we're going to set things right as well, once and for all!" he spoke with determination. "No one will even have to think about Grima for another million years! Shepherds! We set up camp for the night and face our final battle tomorrow morning!"

"Very well..." Naga gave a small nod of her head and closed her eyes, beginning to fade into shimmering particles. "Rest, brave warriors..."

As soon as she disappeared completely, Tiki snapped out of her trance and opened her eyes. She seemed unsteady standing up, so she slowly sat down cross-legged on the floor.

"Lady Tiki, are you alright?" Lucina asked with concern. "You don't look well..."

"I am fine," she responded, voice fading. "I'm just... a little sleepy again..."

"Do you need anything?" Chrom inquired. "We could provide you with a bed if you need it..."

"No, thank you," Tiki smiled. "The rest I need now is more akin to meditation than anything else. I won't need a bed. I *do* have a request though: if you don't mind, I would like to accompany you in your battle against Grima."

"Lady Tiki, are you sure?" Lucina asked. "It will be extremely dangerous..."

"I am sure," the manakete nodded. "I am fully aware of Grima's strength, but if you fail, the world will surely be destroyed. I must help you protect it."

"Then your assistance will be much appreciated, milady," Chrom spoke. "We'll need all the help we can get."

"Good..." Tiki closed her eyes as she dozed off. "I will wait for your return... tomorrow morning..."

As they walked out of the shrine, Morgan turned to Robin again excitedly. "Father! Once we kick Grima's dragon butt can you teach me how to use stronger magic? I want to be able to use Thoron as well as you can!"

"Of course, kiddo," Robin smiled and tousled her hair, encouraged by his daughter's belief in him. "We'll work every single day until you're *better* than me."

"No way!" Morgan argued. "I could never be better than you, Father, because you're already the best! Maybe *almost* as good, but not *better*!"

"I think you can be," he told her. "You have the best of both of us, Morgan. Me and your mother."

"Your father is right, Morgan," Lucina added. "You're going to do great things."

"But until then, I have to learn everything I can from you guys!" Morgan smiled, taking both of their hands. "I have to make up for all the lost time that Grima took away, and I'll do it with my family by my side! My whole family!"

There you have it... My personal interpretation of the Future Past and Morgan's backstory. THE FEELS! Morgan is the biggest enigma of all the characters I think, especially if Robin marries Lucina or one of the other future kids. I hope this clarified mostly everything about her, from why she used aggressive tactics in her game last chapter to why she uses fire magic (not anymore!). I also couldn't pass up the chance to write baby/toddler Morgan and her interactions with her parents!

Geez there's so much to talk about that I would probably end up writing another chapter-length explanation to go through everything, so I hope Naga explained everything well enough for me! A few little things though -

I didn't forget Tiki haha! I was just waiting for the right time to add her! Also I decided to give all the mothers and kids a speaking line or two! If you've ever wondered why I never mention the kids' fathers (besides Robin/Lucina,

Chrom/Sumia, and Lissa/Lon'qu because I needed a father for Owain), there *is* an intended reason for that actually! I thought if I never say who the kids' dads are, you, the reader, can essentially imagine your own personal pairings in this story! So if one of you readers really likes Cordelia with Stahl, you are right! If another one of you readers really likes Cordelia with Gaius, you are also right! Always looking out for you guys!

Panne does actually mean "kit" and not "kid". A kit is a baby rabbit, so I figured she would refer to all babies and children as such.

I get how weapons like swords and lances can break and everything, but I never really got how tomes could break... So I assumed that each tome has a set amount of power in it, and when all that power is used up, the tome become worthless or "breaks".

I figured that Grima's (Robin's) body is still mortal, so it can be injured normally and technically destroyed even though Grima's soul itself can't be put to sleep without the Falchion. My little explanation for why Grima in the game can technically be defeated without even using Chrom or Lucina's Falchion to attack him. The Grima that appeared in Morgan's future/this current timeline has a weak body (the limp leg and all), and this was due to Robin fighting Grima's control for all those years. Gradually he wrought control away, bit by bit, and was essentially destroying his own body to weaken Grima in it. Even though this Grima was from Morgan's future, he still knows Lucina and the rest of the children from their personal ruined future - this is because I imagine there to only be one Grima, and he just exists across multiple timelines. He may be resurrected in one time and still asleep in another, but every "Grima" shares the same mind.

Also, it was a little hard to pick up on, but the room that Morgan is sent to in Plegia Castle was meant to be Robin's old room. Like, when he was a wee child and still in Plegia. That's why the room is filled with books and writing supplies.

If you guys have a specific question or two, I'm always open to PMs if needed! Depending on how I choose to structure the next chapter, the battle with Grima will either be next chapter or the one after. Now, I'm not going to say when the next chapter will be (because the chapters seem to be taking increasingly longer than I think), but just know that it *will* be coming soon! I've just gotta take a few day's break from continuously writing and editing this insanely long chapter first...

Chapter 24: Don't Forget

This fic isn't dead! I'm sorry that this update took so long to be completed, but being a high school senior now has thrown so many responsibilities on me regarding college applications and all... I had to get used to my new schedule and workload for a while when the school year started, so I wasn't able to work on this chapter as much as I would have liked. But here it is everyone - Chapter 24!

In which the fate of the world is determined and an old promise is remembered

Chapter 24 – Don't Forget

Robin's eyelids flittered open, and he saw only darkness. He blinked a few times to adjust his eyes to the low light and sat upright as the shadows took familiar but hazy shapes. *It must be the middle of the night...* He ran his right hand through his hair as he glanced around the inside of his tent. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, so he reclined back into bed and rested his head on the pillow. He needed rest; they were to fight Grima in the morning. The Fell Dragon would inevitably attempt to take over his body again, so he needed as much strength as he could to resist the monster's mental onslaught.

...So then why couldn't he sleep? Something was amiss. He could sense it. Robin sat up again and listened outside. It wasn't what he heard that disturbed him, but rather, what he didn't hear. He heard... nothing. Dead silence. No blowing wind, rustling leaves, or chirps from the omnipresent nocturnal insects. Something definitely was amiss.

"Lucina..." he whispered. "Wake up..."

No response.

Without taking his gaze off the canvas walls of the tent, he moved his hand around on the bedside, searching for the gentle curve of her shoulder. Come to think of it, he couldn't hear her soft breathing either... "Lucina?" he asked a little louder, looking down beside him. She wasn't there. *That's odd... I thought for sure she was with me when we fell asleep...*

Robin swung his legs out from underneath the covers of the bed and groped around in the darkness until he found his boots. Sliding them on and standing, he walked around to the other side of the bed and searched the floor. Lucina's boots were missing too... Was he mistaken? Maybe she was just in her own tent and he was imagining them being together last night...

He needed to clear his head if he was ever going to get some rest. Walks usually helped, so he found and lit the small lantern on his desk and ventured out into the night. The cloud cover was thick, so rays of moonlight were unable to guide him through camp. He had to rely on the lantern, whose flickering flame cast darting shadows across his surroundings. Robin considered visiting Lucina's tent to check on her, but he was afraid he would disturb or wake her; she was a terribly light sleeper. He didn't have any destination in particular, so he simply wandered around camp, hoping to hear any sort of sound that would ease his mind other than the crunch of his own boots on the dirt.

Eventually he found himself at the foot of a large staircase, which could only have been those to Naga's shrine. Perhaps the mystic aura that lingered inside would soothe his nerves somewhat, and he reasoned that it wouldn't hurt to try. Once he scaled the stairs however, the uncertainty that he was feeling only grew. The shrine was much more different at night than it was during the day; the long, ordinarily light-filled corridor that had seemed so inviting and reassuring was now... eerie. Robin rubbed his eyes and shook his head, attempting to banish the feeling from his mind.

"I'm imagining things..." he whispered to no one but himself. "Everything's fine..." His confident words were having no effect on improving his distinctly shaky voice. *Naga's most sacred shrine shouldn't feel like this.* "I'm imagining things..." Despite his common sense now begging him to return to his tent, there was another nagging feeling in the back of his head that urged him to continue inside.

His steps echoed softly through the hall as he walked forward. The farther he went, the less he felt like he would be able to turn around and go back, but he pressed on regardless. Robin held the lantern up over his head, gaze wandering to the pillars that lined the corridor and the high ceiling they held up. His foot suddenly struck something soft on the ground and he almost tripped, catching himself before he plummeted to the stone floor. Robin lowered his lantern and let out a sharp gasp. The lantern dropped out of his hand to the floor and shattered into bits, but the tiny flame that still burned inside was enough to illuminate a woman's crumpled form on the ground.

"Lucina!" he yelled, dropping at once to a crouch beside her. He could hear her breathing, but it was faint and strained. "Lucina! Are you okay?!" He seized her shoulder and turned her around so he could see her face as well as the deep,

bloody gash in her chest. "Oh gods... Lucina! What happened?!"

Her eyes squinted open and she gazed up at him strangely. "...Robin?" she whispered.

"Yes, it's me! What happened, Lucina?! What happened?!" he panicked.

"You..." she spoke as she gasped for air. "Why couldn't you save me, Robin?"

"W...What?"

"Why couldn't you save me?" she repeated. "Why couldn't you save me? Why did you leave me... to die?"

"N...No! I d...didn't! What are you saying?" Robin cried, squeezing her arms.

"You couldn't... save me... You... left me... Why?"

"L...Lucina, please listen! Tell me what happened to you! W...Who could have done this?!"

She lifted up a weak hand and shakily extended her finger, pointing at him accusingly. "You... You did this... to me..."

Robin felt his hands go sickeningly warm and sticky. He held them up in front of him in horror, and sure enough they were covered in blood. Her blood. "N...No... I...I would never!" He tried to wipe it off on his pants but it was impossible. It was smeared all over, in every crease of his palm, under his fingernails... Permeating his very skin... "I...I'm going to get help, Lucina! Y...You'll be o...okay!"

"Too late..." she rasped, struggling to breathe. "Too late... You're too late..." Lucina looked up at him with tears and betrayal in her eyes. "Why did you... have to kill me, Robin? W...Why?"

"N...No! I...I..."

"Your fault..." she whispered as her life faded away. "Your fault..."

"L...Lucina! Lucina! You can't die!" Robin begged, holding her tightly. "Y...You can't!"

"She's dead," another voice sounded out of the darkness.

Robin looked up to find a hooded figure with gleaming red eyes approaching him. He stood up shakily as it stopped a few feet away from him. "W...Who are you?" he asked. "D...Did you do this to her?"

"You don't recognize me?" the figure spoke, voice disturbingly familiar. "You know me, Father. It's me, Morgan!" The figure reached up to lower her cowl, and sure enough Morgan's smiling face came clearly into view.

"No... You're not Morgan... Y...You're not my daughter..." Robin stammered, taking a step backwards.

"Yes... I... am..." she insisted, red eyes trained on him venomously. "You're the one who made me this way, Father... Look at what you've done to me... I'm a killer... A murderer... A slave... Is this what you wanted me to become?"

"I would n...never wish that upon you..."

"Then tell me why I'm like this, *Father!*" she demanded, hissing the last word and taking a step closer. "This is your fault! Yours!"

"Morgan..." Robin grasped the sides of his head in anguish as he backed away from her. "I didn't mean... for this to happen..."

"It's happened before..." Morgan's voice changed to one much more sinister. "And it will happen once again..."

"Grima..."

"All of your resistance, all your struggles against me will be for naught," Grima spoke almost gleefully from Morgan's lips. "What did Lucina say when she failed to prevent Emmeryn's death? That time always favors its original course? It's true, you know. Time does favor its original course, and its ultimate destination is one where you become one with me!"

"No..." Robin clenched his teeth. "I'll never succumb to you..."

"You will... You will after you do this!" Grima cried, holding Morgan's arms out and gesturing towards himself and towards Lucina's body. "This is your fault, Robin... Everything that's happened to them has been *your* doing!"

Robin continued stepping backwards as Grima spoke until all he could see was the monster's red eyes. His vision was becoming hazy... His mind was slipping... In the darkness, the two eyes appeared to split into six.

"Look at what's happened to them!" Grima's voice pounded inside his head. "You lost them once, and you'll lose them again!"

Robin screamed and shot upright with wide eyes. He looked around wildly, trying to get out of bed but finding himself tangled in the covers. Without thinking he attempted to free himself, thrashing his legs violently.

"Robin!" Lucina's voice immediately cried out from the darkness. She was already sitting up next to him. "What happened?! You're drenched in sweat!"

"I...I..." Robin couldn't manage anything else. His breathing was so hard and labored that his chest was starting to hurt. Reason and common sense were the last two things on his mind right now in his state of complete panic. "G...Grima's in the shrine! He's h...here! I saw..."

"Robin, stop!" Lucina shouted, wrapping both her hands around his chest and pinning his arms to his sides to restrict his wild movements.

He froze in response to her touch, and his heavy breathing became the only sound that still filled the air. He turned his head to his side, easily making out even in the low light Lucina's terrified expression looking back at him.

"Y...You're okay, Robin..." Lucina spoke fearfully. "You're okay..." She pulled him closer beside her and squeezed his chest. "I've got you... I'm here..."

His breathing slowed somewhat.

"Calm... It's okay..." she soothed. "Nothing happened..."

Robin reached out with trembling hands and locked her into an iron grip. "L...Lucina... Y...You're alive..." He eased one hand behind Lucina's head and pulled her tightly into his shoulder. "You're alive..."

"I'm okay, Robin," she reassured. "Y...You were having a nightmare... A terrible one... You were shivering and muttering things in your sleep... I tried to wake you from it but I couldn't..."

"It was so real..." Robin broke into tears almost instantly. "It was so real..."

"I'm sorry..." Lucina was trying to mask her own fear for him as best as she could. "Do you... want to talk about it?"

"Y...You were there, Lucina! But you were dying! Dying like in Morgan's future! Y...You were dying, a...and I couldn't save you, and you kept saying it was m...my fault... My fault!" he sobbed, barely choking words out. "A...And Grima was there... and he took over Morgan's body, and he said... he said... that I lost you both once, and now... I'm going to lose you both again!"

"You're not going to lose us, Robin..." Lucina comforted. "We won't leave..."

"I...I held you in my arms, Lucina! I watched the life leave your eyes! It was so r...real!" he cried. "And when you died... I wanted to die with you... I never want to see that again... I...I..."

"Robin," she urged over his sobs to get him to quiet down. "Calm..." She gently loosened his grip around her and eased his head into her lap so she could brush her fingers through his silver hair. "None of it was real... I'm right here with you, and Morgan is in the tent right next to ours. It's okay. You're safe."

Robin's sobs gradually quieted, and in response to her caress his muscles relaxed a bit. "Never again, Lucina..." he spoke fearfully. "Never again..."

"Shh..." she whispered in response, gliding her fingers down his cheeks. "You need to get some rest, love... We end this war once and for all tomorrow, remember?"

"I can't... I can't stop thinking about what I've done..." Robin protested weakly. "Look at what I did to Morgan in her future... She was so sweet, so innocent, and I ripped all of that out of her and abused her need for my affection to turn her into a killing machine... And you, Lucina..." He turned his head in her lap to hide his face, falling silent for a few seconds before continuing. "I let you die... I took away your future... My hands are forever stained with your blood and my sins, and I can't just wash them out... When I close my eyes, I'm reminded of all the atrocities I've committed. Sleep will be my

punishment..."

Lucina placed one hand on his right shoulder and slid it down the length of his arm until she found his hand underneath the covers. Gently taking hold of his wrist, she withdrew his hand and held it up for Robin to see with the palm facing him. "Robin, look at your hand," she ordered. "It's not stained with blood. There aren't any sins etched into your palm. The only thing that's stained is your coat, which is because I was a clumsy fool."

"...Maybe not my palm..." the man admitted quietly, turning his hand around to reveal the Mark of Grima emblazoned on his skin. "This is what stains my hand. As long as I have this, I'll be reminded of the monster I was meant to be. This mark defines me... It isn't like yours, Lucina." He turned his head again so that he could see her face, and he reached up to fondly rub the skin underneath her left eye with his thumb. "Yours is a symbol of peace and kindness, and whenever I look into your eyes I can see the proof that you're a beautiful person inside and out." The corners of his lips upturned ever so slightly. "You would never know I suppose, but when you really smile or laugh, your Brand gets just a little brighter. Enough to make your left eye look a bit lighter than your right. That's how I know when you're truly happy. I just have to gaze into your beautiful blue eyes... But my mark..." His smile crumbled away as he began referring to himself again. "My mark is shameful. It tells people that I'm the vessel of destruction incarnate. Your eye glows when you're happy. My hand glows when I'm angry, or when I'm in pain. Your Brand needs to be shown to the world to remind the people that peace can exist and mine needs to be hidden, or else they'll be reminded that true peace can never be achieved with the existence of the foul creature that this symbol represents..."

"You resisted Grima, Robin. You are *not* a harbinger of destruction," she reminded. "You're stronger than he is. He has no control over your body anymore."

"Maybe not..." he replied. "But I'm still meant to be his body. That's what I'm supposed to be. If Grima doesn't control my limbs, what does that make me? I'm a vessel without a host. Empty. A husk. No one could love... *this*..." he spoke solemnly as he gestured to himself.

"I do." Lucina pressed their palms together and slipped her fingers in between his. "I love you." She bent down to kiss his forehead, keeping her face lingering close to his as she spoke. "The marks that we have don't define us, Robin. Look at my grandfather. My father's father. He had my very same Brand, but he was a violent warmonger with a desire for bloodshed. He didn't carry Naga's message of peace just because he had her mark. And look at you. You might have Grima's mark, but that doesn't mean you have to be like him. *We* define ourselves and our futures. You know that."

He sighed. "It's just... I can't help but feel responsible for what I've done in other timelines... Maybe not this one, but yours. Morgan's. I feel so... guilty..."

"Don't be, Robin. You can't blame yourself for things that you didn't do. Sure there are alternate versions of you from other times, just like there are for me," Lucina explained. "Me and the Lucina of this world. We may share the same name and face, but we aren't the same person. We've experienced different things that have shaped us into who we are, and the same idea applies to you. You've made different choices than the Robin in my future and in Morgan's future, so you aren't truly the same person as they are. You need to define yourself as who *you* are now, not who you could have been."

"...You're right," Robin agreed after some consideration. "I can't move forward when these doubts are holding me back." He fell silent for a few minutes, not feeling very tired and enjoying Lucina's fingers running through his hair. "I'm sorry I've been so dependent on you recently, Lucina... I can't tell you how grateful I am that you're here for me, but it's far too much for me to burden you with. I was supposed to be the one helping *you* through this whole ordeal, and from the moment I stole the Fire Emblem I've haven't done what I promised you I would do."

"Robin, if you need help, I'm not going to just... ignore you! If you help me and I don't help you back, that's a rather one-sided relationship, don't you think? We need to support each other. If I don't do my part, it's not fair to you."

"I've just needed your help so much recently..."

"Only for a few days!" Lucina protested. "And when we defeat Grima tomorrow, you'll feel so much better." She eased his head from her lap onto the pillow, and then rested her own head down on his chest so that she could hear his heartbeat. "Everything will be better once Grima is gone."

Robin wrapped his arms around her back as he thought. "Lucina?"

"Hmm?"

"When you say gone, you mean asleep, right?"

"Yes," she nodded, readjusting herself slightly in his arms. "Naga said sleep can be our only victory."

"What if Grima could be gone for good though? What if he wasn't truly immortal?"

"But Naga said not even the Awakened Falchion could truly kill him." She paused to yawn loudly. "If her divine blade at full power can't destroy him for good, what can?"

"...I'm not sure," Robin murmured, growing a little tired himself. "Maybe I'll think of something..."

"If anyone could devise a plan brilliantly crazy enough to kill the immortal, it's you," Lucina chuckled. "If you really *could* destroy him for good, it would be even better than putting him to sleep."

Robin was silent.

"Speaking of sleep..." Lucina yawned again. "That's what we should be doing... We need rest... Maybe instead you could try thinking about what *we'll* do once this is all over... I wonder what comes next for us..."

"I wonder..." he repeated.

"Mm... Good night, Robin..." Lucina murmured as her eyes closed.

"Good night, Lucina..."

Lucina squirmed around in bed, on the boundary between being awake and asleep. She gradually pushed herself upright, rolling over so that she was in a sitting position. With eyes still closed, she raised her shoulders and put her arms up into the air, letting out a small sigh as she stretched her limbs. Her shoulders slumped down once she had finished, and she got to work slipping her legs out from under the covers.

"Good morning," Robin spoke tiredly.

"Hmm?" Lucina blinked a few times to adjust her eyes and stared in the direction of his voice.

Robin was already awake, fully clothed with coat and all, and was sitting at his little desk in the opposing corner of the room. He had his back to her and was hunched over a few incredibly old books, looking rather frustrated with his elbows on the desk and his head in his hands. "You slept well, I hope," he murmured distractedly, not turning away from his work. "You looked very peaceful."

"Yes, I was fine," Lucina replied, swinging her legs over the side of the bed without getting up to stand just yet. "I can't help but be anxious about the stakes of today's imminent battle though."

"Of course. We're about to face the very same monster who's haunted and tormented you all your life. I'm sure anxious is an understatement..." Robin replied grimly, running his fingers through his hair. "Your clothes are over there when you want to change out of your nightgown." He gestured towards a chair by the bedside, where he had her usual outfit neatly laid out and folded in a pile. Her boots were standing up side by side nearby, and even her sheathed Falchion was propped up against the side of the chair.

"Thank you, Robin..." Lucina spoke, a little surprised. He had never really struck her as someone that organized, especially given the usual chaos of his tent's interior. Now that she thought about it... She glanced around briefly to find that apart from his desk, everything was clean and tidy. It was as if the entire tent magically organized itself overnight. She must have had a rather shocked expression in her eyes, for Robin laughed a little when she looked at him again.

"What? You thought I was a slob *all* the time?" he smiled.

"I wasn't going to say that," Lucina frowned at the thought. "I was going to say that you're just a little disorganized sometimes. It's not a bad thing."

"More like all the time," he joked briefly before his expression turned to one more serious. "I know it sounds a little strange, but I actually like to clean things when I'm stressed sometimes. I couldn't sleep that well, so I got up a little while ago and tried to organize everything to calm my nerves..."

"Ah... Did you get *any* sleep last night?" Lucina asked nervously. "You didn't have any more nightmares that I didn't wake up for, did you?"

"No, thanks to you," he reassured her. "I was able to get a little sleep, but I had so much on my mind that I couldn't relax for long..." He turned back to his work and hunched over to scrutinize the pages of the book he currently had open. "I'll leave whenever you want to change," he offered.

Lucina slid out of bed and walked over barefoot behind him, peering over his shoulder and trying to make sense of the seemingly random symbols on the page. "What are you reading exactly?" she asked after a minute, giving up any hope of understanding it. "It looks really old."

"Old indeed..." Robin groaned, putting a hand on his chin. "About a thousand years old to be exact."

"But what *are* they?"

"Ancient manuscripts." Robin stuck his finger in the book to keep his page, closed it, and held it up to show Lucina the cover. The leather had aged terribly and the writing on the cover was mostly faded except for one symbol that stood out to her more than any of the others. "Notice anything?" he asked, holding up the back of his right hand beside it for comparison.

"The Mark of Grima..." Lucina murmured. "These books are about him, aren't they? And you said a thousand years old? They must date back to when the first exalt put him to sleep using the Awakening..."

Robin nodded, placing the book back down and opening it to his previous page. "I purchased these from a traveling merchant a while back who apparently had salvaged them from some abandoned Grimleal library on the outskirts of Plegia. I hoped that they would prove useful in providing information that would help me formulate some kind of strategy to defeat him, but they were so old that I gave up on them for a while. I remember now why I stopped trying to make sense of them..."

"I don't recognize any of those symbols..." Lucina sighed helplessly. "They look like the ones in tomes, but I have no idea how to read those either..."

"They *are* written in the same language as tomes are, so I recognize the style. You're supposed to read it backwards from right from left, rather than left to right like our books today," Robin explained. "But I can only translate certain words and phrases... Most of the alphabet has been lost to history, and our ancestors used different words to describe things back then that we don't use anymore either. The meanings of the phrases on tomes have been passed down orally for generations, but as for the language as a whole, not so much. I've been trying to teach myself piece by piece, learning common patterns in their speech and going from there, but it's just impossible to make sense of it." He hit a fist against the desk in frustration, causing the old wood to creak loudly. "I have all this potential knowledge that could prove instrumental to defeating Grima but I can't use any of it!"

Lucina placed her hands on his shoulders in an effort to calm him. "Is there *anything* you were able to decipher? Anything at all?"

Robin took a deep breath and his voice fell in volume. "Some things I suppose..." He flipped back a few pages to find a hand drawn picture of Grima's full dragon form from the side. "One of the problems I'm having is that this is a Grimleal book, so it's not going to explicitly state his weaknesses if he has any. I have to extrapolate based on context. Grima apparently has a scaly hide made out of some form of dark energy. It's thick, but with the right weapon, namely yours and Chrom's Falchions and possibly some forms of powerful magic, it might be able to be penetrated. The problem is that his entire body is covered in these massive bony plates that are at *least* a foot thick. Not even the Awakened Falchion can pierce armor that tough."

"Naga knows we tried in our future..." Lucina reminisced. "We attempted everything. No amount of arrows will even make a scratch."

"Right, so that cuts out the option of attacking from long range. His armor does have kinks though. He needs to be able to move, so his armor has to move with him as well. This potentially could open up weak spots in his skin that we could attack. The problem of course is just how massive he is... Even driving the Falchion into his skin will be nothing more than a pinprick to him, so that's out of the question."

"An attack by Falchion *is* a threat to him though," Lucina offered. "Did I tell you that Grima came to Ylissstol right before we escaped into the past? He attacked me personally..."

"He did? What happened?"

"Well..." Lucina frowned, trying to recall the event. "Grima's expiration is devastatingly powerful, and he used it to blow a gaping hole in the castle wall... He told me that the future is built upon the past, and that nothing would be able to change it. Then he tried to consume me... Whole..."

"Really?!" Robin looked shocked. "How did you get away?"

"I barely managed to evade his jaws as he crashed his monstrous head into the castle, and while he was recovering, I leapt at him and drove the Falchion into one of his eyes. That forced him to withdraw his head long enough to allow me to escape with the rest of my friends through the portal Naga opened for us..."

"Gods... That must have been terrifying..." Robin clenched his teeth. "To face Grima all by yourself..."

"It was..." Lucina grimaced. "I thought for sure I would perish right then and there before I even made it into the past... But that's not important now. I suppose my point was that we could try to attack his eyes... They're uncovered after all. Could we blind him completely if we take out all six?"

"Possibly..." Robin replied, growing frustrated again. "But that still won't beat him. He has to have another weakness somewhere else, but I can't find it! The only other option is to destroy his vessel because that body is still mortal, but he could be anywhere by now... I've been staring at these books for hours and I still have no strategies to employ or cards to play..."

"Maybe you need to give your mind a break for a few minutes," Lucina offered, squeezing his shoulders. "And don't forget that Naga may have an idea as well. If she knows where to strike him, you could formulate a strategy around that, couldn't you? Then we could finally strike him down."

"Right..." the man spoke quietly. "We can strike him down, but he'll live on forever regardless..." He sat still for a moment in thought before closing the book and standing up. "...I should let you get changed," he spoke at last, changing the subject. "I'm going to go help Chrom with preparations. Everyone is meeting in the shrine when you're ready." He was already half outside the tent before Lucina could respond. "See you in a bit."

Lucina stared at the now closed tent flap for a few moments after he left. "I'm sorry, Robin..." she sighed quietly to herself as she began to change her clothes. "I know this is hard for you, but once we stop Grima you won't have to face this torment any longer... I promise..."

Lucina finished strapping Falchion to her hip and slipped outside the tent, folded nightgown clutched between her arms so that it was almost hidden from view. She didn't think that anyone knew yet that she and Robin had been sleeping in the same tent these past few days and didn't want to bring about any rumors, so she quickly made her way across camp to her own tent without letting anyone see what she was carrying. Upon her arrival, she darted inside and placed the piece of clothing inside the chest at the foot of her bed. Just as she closed the chest and stood up, she heard a voice outside the tent.

"Mother?"

"Morgan?" Lucina called. "Is that you?"

"Yeah, it's me," the girl's voice responded from the opposite side of the canvas walls. "Could I come in?"

"Of course," Lucina replied, pushing the tent flap open and inviting her daughter inside. "Is there anything you need, sweetie?"

"No... I just wanted to check to make sure that you were okay," Morgan spoke with a small smile. "Father and Grandfather are calling everyone into the shrine so Naga can take us to Origin Peak all at once. Are you coming?"

"I was just on my way out. Would you like to walk there together?" Lucina offered, taking a few steps outside before realizing that Morgan wasn't right behind her. She paused and peeked back inside where the girl had her gaze trained on her own boots. "Morgan... Is something wrong?" she asked, walking back inside and closing the tent flap. "You look like you have something on your mind... Is it your future?"

The girl was quiet for a moment before affirming her statement with a nod. "Yes... It's my future... The place where I came from that used to be all one big blank is now crystal clear, a...and I'm not really sure what to make of it... I was up all night just... thinking... I know I've always wanted my memories back no matter how terrible they might have been. I thought knowing my past would strengthen me and give me confidence, but now that I finally have them, I don't feel so strong at all..."

"I know. It's difficult..." Lucina agreed. "The memories I have of the future I came from were almost all terrible. Nothing but death, destruction, and despair. Admittedly... there were some nights when I wished just for a second that it would all end... I could just allow death to claim me and my pain would go away. But I held on as tightly as I could to the thought of seeing my family and friends again; it gave me enough hope to keep fighting against the overpowering bad memories." She pushed a few loose strands of Morgan's hair from her forehead and behind her ears. "Still, I was so dragged down

by these awful memories even when I came here that I would never smile or laugh. I don't want you to become how I used to be."

"How were you able to change, Mother?" the girl asked innocently. "The bad memories are, just like you said, so overpowering..."

"Now you know one of the reasons I fell in love with your father," Lucina smiled. "He taught me that we need to focus on the good memories over the bad, and that we can create more good memories for ourselves rather than let fate decide what's in store for us. So now I stay strong by believing in all the new memories we'll make and the future we'll write."

"Father taught you that?" Morgan asked in awe, and then her face became very humble. "Is...Is it okay... if I can... be a part of that future too? Yours and Father's?"

"Of course you can, Morgan. Why would you not be a part of it?"

"Well... like I said... I've been thinking, and I came across the idea that you may not... want me," the girl spoke in almost a whisper. "That you're caring for me now just because I'm still a kid, and that once the war is over, you won't want anything to do with me... I'm not... your real daughter... The woman who gave me the gift of life is gone..."

"Morgan... I may not have birthed you, but that doesn't change the fact that you're my daughter. Every instinct in my entire body is telling me that I need to protect you with everything I have, and that's not because I just see you as some sort of chore. It's because I love you." Lucina slipped her arms around the girl's back and gave her a hug.

"R...Really?"

"I love you very much, and so does your father. Have I ever told you how much your father wanted a child?"

"He did?"

"Wanted a child is an understatement," Lucina smiled. "He was absolutely crushed when I first told everybody about all my companions that came with me from the future because none of them were his. He told me that he used to watch the other parents with their children, even me and your Grandfather, and wonder for hours what being a parent really felt like. So when he found out about you, he was beyond thrilled. Especially during this time in his life when he's struggling with his own self-identity and self-worth, for you to call him your hero meant so much to him."

"I never knew that I helped him like that..." Morgan spoke in amazement. "I need to tell him how much he means to me more..."

"And as for me, you've shown me that your father was right. That the future *can* change, and it can change for the better," Lucina continued. "Maybe the last few years of your future were terrible, but look at the first few ones. I mean, the Robin and Lucina of your world had you, which never could have happened if I didn't come back in time in the first place. Now it's up to us today to secure a better tomorrow, and I want you to be a part of it. It's okay if you don't see me as your real mother, but all I ask is for you to let me pick up where she left off. Is that alright?"

Morgan's form shook slightly, not with tears but laughter. "Who am I kidding?" she responded. "I have my real mother right here! After all these years... my mom came back for me..." She gave Lucina a tight squeeze and took a step back so she could make eye contact with her.

Lucina couldn't help but notice Morgan's right eye, the one with the Brand. It did seem more prominent on her smiling face, and the faint glow made her right eye a lighter shade of brown than the other. Robin was right when he had mentioned that last night. *This is how I must look to him when I'm happy...*

"Let's go beat Grima so bad that he'll stay asleep for a *million* years!" Morgan urged. "Just... be really careful, Mother... Now that I've found you, I don't want to lose you a second time..."

"I don't have any intention of dying out there," Lucina reassured.

Just then, Robin pushed his way through the tent flap. "Lucina? Morgan? It's..."

Before he could finish, Morgan leapt into his arms and gave him a crushing hug. "I love you, Father!" she cried. "You're my hero and the greatest dad ever!"

Robin blinked in surprise, taken slightly off guard, before his cheeks reddened and he returned the embrace. "I love you too, kiddo," he smiled.

Morgan held the hug for a few moments before she released his chest and let him breathe. "I'm sorry, Father..." she shrugged. "I interrupted you."

"I don't mind," Robin reassured, still looking a little confused but noticeably proud. "I was just coming to look for you two. Everyone else is at the shrine. We're almost ready to go."

"I guess we were in here a little longer than we thought," Lucina noted. "We should go immediately."

"Right," Morgan nodded as she followed Robin outside. "Lead the way, Father!"

"Ah, you found them," Chrom nodded as Robin walked to his side with Lucina and Morgan close behind. "That's everyone then, I presume?"

"I believe so," Robin affirmed. "We didn't see anyone else while we were walking through camp." He kept looking around the shrine nervously as if he was expecting something terrible would happen any second. Judging from the number of times he glanced behind him to check on her, Lucina assumed his nervousness was likely stemming from the nightmare he had last night.

"Good," Chrom replied.

"Is everyone ready?" Tiki asked as she stepped forward.

"Yes, we are now."

"I will call the Divine Dragon," the manakete spoke, and then crouched down in front of the statue of Naga's dragon form. Much like she had done yesterday, she began to speak in an incomprehensible dialect and the air around her distorted until a shimmering image of the Divine Dragon materialized over her head. Eyes glowing blue, the manakete stepped forward, speaking with the voice of Naga herself.

"Greetings, Awakener," she spoke. "I trust that you and your army are well rested after spending the night."

"Some of us may have had a more restless night than others, but I believe we were all able to regain some energy regardless. It served us well to heed your advice," Chrom informed her, taking a small bow in her presence.

"That is promising news..." Naga's voice echoed softly. "I have been regaining my strength as well, and now I have the ability to bring you where the Fell Dragon resides. I must warn you that his power grows with every passing minute, and if you fail to defeat him today, you may not have another chance to strike him in his weakened state."

"I believe we're all aware of the stakes of this mission," Chrom spoke with determination, face hardening with his resolve. "We are ready."

"Very well. Then I ask all of you to clear your thoughts..." Naga urged. "It will be easier to bring you there when you have focused minds..." The room fell very quiet, and the Divine Dragon's image closed her eyes and held out both her hands in the air. Slowly the light in the shrine began to brighten and everything seemed hazy, as if the very world was slipping out of focus. There was a loud popping sound and a burst of blinding light, and suddenly they weren't in the shrine anymore.

Lucina took a deep breath in of the warm yet stale air. A little disoriented from the teleportation, she had to catch herself before losing her footing on the rocky ground. She blinked a few times to recover her vision, and the cliffs of Origin Peak came sharply into view. They had arrived at the base of the volcano, and Lucina gazed upwards at the landscape before her. It was barren and dark, dead trees and shriveled plants the only indication that there was once life on the mountainside. It wasn't the dying landscape that bothered her as much as the ominous clouds identical to the ones that had materialized at the Dragon's Table lingering over the summit. Occasionally the sky lit up with a bolt of lightning, briefly revealing a massive, dark shape inside the clouds.

"Grima..." Chrom growled, following her gaze upward.

"Yes..." Naga's image spoke, still hovering over Tiki. "The Fell Dragon is indeed here, and his power is strong... His presence is overwhelming mine."

"The air here... It doesn't seem right..." Chrom murmured, shifting around uncomfortably.

"And these plants, milord," Frederick spoke, taking a blackened, shriveled limb of a small tree in his hand. "They look like they've all recently died... Was it the volcano, Lady Naga? Did Grima's presence somehow trigger a massive eruption?"

"Grima's presence is indeed the cause of this decay, but he did not call forth the fires of the earth," the Divine Dragon explained. "The Fell Dragon does not just reap the souls of mankind. He is harvesting the life force of every living thing on this mountain to add to his own. It is for this reason that I suggested you receive a full night's sleep before coming here, and it is why you must hurry. Even at this very moment, Grima is draining your life energy as well, and soon you will no longer have the strength to fight..."

"But where in the seven hells will we strike?" Frederick gritted his teeth. "The Fell Dragon is as big as this very mountain! Our weapons will be unable to harm him in the slightest!"

"And my father's old... I mean, Grima's body disappeared in the Dragon's Table," Morgan added.

"You still have a chance," Naga echoed. "Grima's vessel is here as well, and he cannot be parted with his dragon body until he recovers his full power."

"He's trapped here..." Robin noted. "The Robin who became Grima..."

"Correct. He is bound to a point on the nape of the dragon's neck. Destroying him is the only way that the Fell Dragon will be able to be harmed at all," the Divine Dragon nodded.

"But that still leaves us the problem of getting close enough to strike him," Chrom spoke.

"Forgive me..." Naga sighed. "I can teleport you onto Grima's back, but his power here is preventing me from doing so from this far away. I will only be able to bring you a short distance. You must get closer to him."

"We have to climb to the summit. It's the closest we'll get," Lucina frowned.

"If you can make it there, I should be able to place you on top of the Fell Dragon," Naga confirmed. "But remember, Awakener. The Fell Dragon will only be forced into slumber if you deal the finishing blow with the Falchion. Otherwise his soul will linger in this world until he finds another suitable host."

Robin grimaced. "Naga!" he exclaimed. "There has to be another way to defeat the Fell Dragon! Isn't there anything we can do to end this vicious cycle? If Grima will continue to reawaken in the future, humankind will never have a true victory! You said that your power can't destroy him, but is there any power greater?"

The Divine Dragon closed her eyes in thought, contemplating his question for a moment before responding. "...Perhaps... But if there is any power strong enough to truly kill the Fell Dragon, 'twould be his own..."

"So you're saying Grima has to kill himself?"

"Correct. But he would never do so of his own accord, and he could never be persuaded to. Grima's only desires are to bring about a complete destruction of this world and to add to his power. He will not relinquish that power so easily."

"But what if Grima... didn't kill himself..." Robin's words were slow and careful. "What if... I was the one to strike Grima down? If Grima and I are one and the same, then wouldn't that mean he would be felled by his own hand?"

"Robin... That's... brilliant!" A smile grew on Lucina's face and she clutched his arm excitedly. "Imagine that! If your idea works, then we would never have to worry about Grima ever again! Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"Typical Robin. Coming up with some plan to save the day again..." Chrom grinned. "But will it actually work, Naga?"

"Robin's and Grima's hearts are linked very closely. Close enough that your plan may be feasible," Naga replied.

"However, this will not come without a consequence. Robin may be able to destroy Grima for good by landing the finishing blow upon him, but you must not forget the circumstances that allow this to be so. If this plan is carried out, then Robin will destroy not only Grima's heart but his own as well."

Lucina paled at the Divine Dragon's very utterance of the words. Her grip on Robin's arm weakened and her hand slipped off to her side limply. "Y...You mean... that Robin... will die?" she asked, voice very small.

Naga's image nodded. "If Robin kills Grima, then he will most certainly perish along with him. Their hearts are too closely linked for the Fell Dragon to die while Robin survives. There *is* a chance... that if Robin has formed bonds with the people of this world that are stronger than the ones that tie him to Grima, then these ties may be able keep him tethered to this reality, but this chance is infinitesimally small. None have ever defied death itself and returned to this tangible world how they once were."

"But if I do this... then Grima will be gone forever?" Robin asked once more to confirm.

"Yes. It may very well be the only way that the Fell Dragon could perish."

Lucina glanced at Robin with concern, and she didn't like the budding look in his eyes one bit. "Robin... D...Don't tell me you're even considering that as an option..."

"But think about it, Lucina..." Robin spoke distantly, gazing up into the stormy clouds above them. "This devastation, this fear, could be ended... forever... And all it would take is..."

"Sacrificing yourself?! No!" Lucina's tone became louder as she grew angrier. "I won't allow it!"

"Don't you die out there, Father!" Morgan warned, eyes of worry a perfect mirror of those of her mother. "I feel like I've just found you again after all these years, and I'm not ready to lose you again!"

Robin looked between them silently, looking conflicted.

"Well? Did you even hear us?" Lucina asked expectantly.

"...Of course I heard you... I just..."

"Listen to me," she demanded, taking him by the shoulders and looking him square in the eyes. "You are not doing this."

"But if it's the only way..."

"It's not the only way. My father can strike Grima down and force him back to sleep. You've made it through so much, Robin. You're not going out like this. You have too many people who love you in this world. People who would be lost without you..." Her voice faltered for just a moment before she reassumed her serious voice. "Okay?"

Robin looked a little surprised by her sudden commanding tone, unsure of how to react.

"Okay?!" Lucina asked again, slightly louder.

"O...Okay," the man stammered.

"Good. End of discussion," Lucina responded, satisfied with his answer and releasing him from her grip. "You're staying here with me... us."

"However you choose to defeat the Fell Dragon, you must do so quickly," Naga warned. "The summit is guarded by the Grimleal, and they have just learned of your presence here. They will stop at nothing to defend their master."

"And we'll stop at nothing to defeat him. I'm confident we'll be able to overpower them," Chrom declared with determination, raising the glowing Falchion above his head. "Shepherds! We came here prepared for a fight, and now in mankind's darkest hour, we must prevail! The outcome of today's endeavor will either change or seal our fates. My friends, I ask you not as your leader but as your brother in arms, will you fight alongside me to preserve our very way of life?"

A spectacular battle cry erupted from both the Ylissean and Feroxi armies alike. Basilio laughed heartily and stepped forward, cracking his knuckles.

"Everyone's ready for a good fight!" he declared eagerly. "Consider the Feroxi army under your command for today. We'll go wherever you want us."

"Here they come..." Flavia had her gaze trained up on the mountainside, carefully monitoring the Plegian forces as they descended. She squinted and raised her hand to her forehead in an attempt to get a better look. "It looks like every single lunatic in Plegia came to our welcoming party. Do we have a plan?"

"Robin?" Chrom asked, turning to his tactician for support.

The situation seemed to snap the man back to reality, and immediately he was focused on the task at hand. "We'll be fighting an uphill battle, so that immediately puts us at the disadvantage..." he reasoned, surveying the area. "We would have a much better chance if we could fight on more level ground. Look at the mountain. It plateaus in a few places." He gestured upwards, indicating all the places he was referring to with a finger. "If we can engage the Grimleal there, it would eliminate their advantage of higher ground."

"They also have been here longer than we have," Lucina noted. "If Grima is sapping the life out of every living thing around here, then surely the Grimleal will be affected too. They'll be weaker than normal."

"Right," the tactician nodded. "And we don't need to defeat them all. If we can stop Grima first then they should retreat. All that leaves us with is a way to direct the fighting to the plateaus... We could use our flying units to essentially corral them into designated areas using throwing weapons. That would give us some sway over the enemy's movement."

"Ha! The Shepherds herding some incredibly ugly sheep!" Basilio remarked with a grin.

"That would work, but we don't have any concrete information regarding what types of soldiers their army consists of. Have you considered that the Grimleal forces may have a lot of archers, Father?" Morgan asked. "It would be dangerous to send our flying units alone without a ground-based escort near a legion of archers, wouldn't it?"

"Fair point. What do you suppose we do then, kiddo?"

Morgan looked a little caught off guard. "W...What do you mean? Why are you asking me? You're the one who has the good ideas around here, Father."

"You thought up of this one, didn't you?" Robin asked. "What do you propose we do? I want to hear it."

"Well..." the girl began, a little unsure of herself now that she was the center of attention. "Maybe instead of our flying units forcing them backwards, we could use long range magic and bows of our own to attack them from the plateaus. They would be forced to come to us unless they wanted to lose a significant portion of their numbers. We could minimize the risk of losing our flying units that way. Um... Right?"

Robin considered the option not more than a second before a smile emerged on his face. "I like your plan better."

Morgan looked at him like he was insane. "W...What? I didn't really think it would be better than your plan! I...I just wanted to contribute and feel like I'm helping..."

"No, you're right. It *would* minimize potential risks. Now *that* is using that tactical mind of yours, kiddo," the man grinned, ruffling his daughter's hair. "Keeping everyone safe just like I taught you, huh?"

"Y...Yeah!" Morgan beamed. "Just like you taught me, Father!"

"That's what we're doing then, but we'll need to secure the plateaus first. We'll use our flying units to take our ranged units up to ensure that we get there before the Grimleal do, then the rest of our forces will back them up," Robin raised his voice to project it into the crowd. "Sumia! Cynthia! I'm going to need you two to bring a small group of archers and mages up to the easternmost clearing! The other pegasus knights will accompany you."

"You can count on us, Robin!" Sumia waved, urging her pegasus to take to the sky to lead the squadron that Robin had set aside up the mountain.

"You got it, Future Big Bro!" Cynthia grinned and followed her mother skyward.

"And which of our battalions will I send up after them?" Robin asked his daughter, eager to test her abilities again.

"...Second," Morgan responded after a moment's consideration. "It has the most defense-oriented units, which would be ideal to support more physically frail pegasus knights."

"Correct," the man nodded, satisfied with her answer, and he raised his voice once again. "Our second battalion will accompany them! I'm going to need Cherche and Gerome to take the third battalion up the far west side of the mountain. Chrom will lead the first battalion to the highest ridge in the center."

"Where do you want us, Robin?" Flavia asked urgently.

"If you don't mind, could you and Basilio split your forces in half to bolster the east and west battalions? Chrom's battalion will be the largest and should be able to manage on its own, but the others could benefit greatly from your extra support."

"Say no more! I've got the west!" Basilio immediately offered, running off to join the portion of the Ylissean army headed there as well. "Flavia will take the east!"

"Apparently I'll be taking the east then..." the other Khan huffed as she set off in the opposite direction to ready her troops. "We've got no time to waste! Let's go!"

"I couldn't agree more..." Chrom growled. "First battalion! Let's move out!"

"Lucina! Morgan! We'll fight with Chrom!" Robin urged, motioning for them to follow him.

"Yes, Father!" Morgan scampered after him, clutching a new Elthunder tome she had received from the convoy tightly in her hands.

"I'll be right here the whole time," Lucina reassured as she unsheathed Falchion and hurried to match his pace, making a clear point to stay directly beside him. Nothing was about to happen to him on her watch.

They arrived on the plateau just before the torrent of Grimleal warriors arrived. Immediately Morgan's plan was set into effect with the mages and archers positioned on the outer edges of the battalion and firing up into the descending army. Just as planned, the Grimleal began to congregate towards the ridges that the Ylissean and Feroxi armies occupied, unwilling to lose more troops to ranged weapons without the ability to counterattack. Once the opposing army was almost upon them, Chrom barked the command for their ranged weapon users to fall back behind the protection of the closer ranged soldiers, and the real battle began.

Lucina's muscles tensed, and her breathing grew rapid but controlled. She had been preparing and training for this one day for what felt like her entire life, and these last remaining Grimleal were all that stood between them and Grima now. Even from just their climb up the volcano itself, she could feel the Fell Dragon's energy draining ability beginning to have the slightest effect on her stamina, and every minute that passed would just make her weaker and Grima stronger. She could afford no idle time.

With a shout, she rushed forward to meet the enemy head on and locked blades with swordsman. In the fraction of a second that their weapons clashed, Lucina could anticipate how her opponent wanted to strike next from the pressure he was exerting his sword. Breaking their clash abruptly to give the man the false assumption that he had already overpowered her, she then allowed him to bring his blade down exactly where she predicted. Sidestepping the swing, she exploited his momentary vulnerability to inflict a fatal downwards slice of Falchion to his side. She then cleared a short distance to counter another opponent who was making an attempt to attack a Ylissean soldier from behind. Not giving him any time to even raise his weapon, Lucina thrust Falchion forward and skewered him through the chest.

Over the roar of combat, she picked out one grunt of pain that made her stomach churn. It was most definitely their tactician. "Robin!" she panicked, ripping her blade out of the Plegian man and turning around, scanning her surroundings wildly until she caught sight of him raising his Levin Sword to blast a heavily armored Grimleal away from him. Lucina was back at his side within seconds, unable to conceal her worry. "Robin! Are you okay?!"

"I'm fine. Just careless," the man grunted, shaking out his left leg. "Just a scratch. I got doubled up and didn't move away from one of them in time."

"I'm sorry..." Lucina gritted her teeth in shame as she kept a close eye on the fighting around them. "I should have been closer to protect you."

"Not your fault," he assured hurriedly, reaching into one of his inside coat pockets to pull out his emergency bandages with his free hand. "Don't think you're..." He paused as he ripped a strip of the cloth bandage loose with his teeth. "Obligated to protect me," he told her, wrapping the minor wound on his leg. "I'll just hold you back. You're a better fighter than I am."

"With a sword perhaps," she grunted modestly, whipping around to cut down another enemy swordsman charging her. "But not with magic. We'll fight together!"

"Right," Robin gave a sharp nod, releasing a bolt of lightning from the tip of his sword at a soldier a few yards away. He positioned himself behind her, facing the opposite direction and standing ready. "I've got your back then."

"And I yours," Lucina responded in turn. "Where's Morgan?"

"Over there with Chrom. I asked her to help defend him. They may be in need of some more help though."

"Then let's get over there, shall we?"

As a pair they pressed forward systematically, piercing the heart of the fighting. Robin provided cover for them both, often waiting until advancing enemies were within Lucina's immediate attack range before striking them with blasts of magic from his Levin Sword. While they were still reeling from the powerful lightning, Lucina lunged forward to deal the finishing blow, returning to Robin's side right after in preparation for the next attack. Though her mind generally focused on nothing more than fighting during battles, she couldn't help but compare how much safer she felt with him around. It seemed like they had been a couple for ages, but she couldn't recall the last time that they had actually fought side by side like this. Sure they had been in the same battalion numerous times before, but never directly supporting one another. Together they made an effective team, making short work of anyone who blocked their path.

Lucina dashed ahead to cut down yet another foe paralyzed by Robin's initial attack, and she just barely completed her strike before she felt an arm wrap tightly around her waist from behind.

"Get down!" Robin shouted, falling backwards to the ground and taking her with him. She landed hard on top of him, just as she saw the spot where she had just been standing distort for a second before bursting into a scalding slime. It lingered for another couple seconds before dropping out of the air and striking the bare earth below, melting shallow holes in the hardened dirt and stone as it fizzled out. "Dark magic," he hissed. "You alright?"

"Y...Yeah, fine," she stammered, attempting to recover from the surprise of the attack. She quickly rolled off his chest, and both stood in unison. "Where did it come from?"

"It's from one of the enemy sorcerers. Over there! He's too far away for me to hit him!" The man gestured towards a figure in the distance wearing the robes of a Plegian mage. He held his tome open in one hand, holding out the other with palm directly facing them. "He's casting it again! Move!"

Lucina broke into a sprint, heading in the opposite direction as Robin just as the slime materialized in the air behind them. As soon as they were far enough away from each other that the sorcerer couldn't target both of them at once, they turned to charge him from two different angles.

The Grimleal caster, fully aware that he was the one they were targeting, began attacking more furiously while backing away to stay out of range. The air blurred in front of Robin, carefully aimed so that it would block his running path. Right as the sizzling magic took shape, he dropped down into a roll underneath it and recovered rather quickly on the other side, resuming his run. Lucina was a little surprised at the maneuver; she had never seen Robin perform a move as agile as that before. But she had no time to consider that thought: a few more Plegian soldiers had broken away from their ranks to intersect them before they could reach the sorcerer and were headed straight at him. Another fancy roll wouldn't exactly help him there.

Pushing her legs to their limits, she sprinted forwards diagonally, crossing Robin's path in front of him. "Get to the caster!" she yelled back at him, raising her blade high in the air to strike one of the approaching soldiers. "I'll handle this!"

"Right!" the tactician shouted back, strapping his Levin Sword to his hip mid-stride and whipping out his Thoron tome from beneath his coat. He sidestepped another one of the sorcerer's attacks, and finally he reached a close enough range that he could properly aim an attack of his own. Robin held open his tome in one hand and outstretched his palm, hand glowing with power as he released a streaming bolt of Thoron. His target just barely evaded his first attack but wasn't as lucky with the second, which shot him down cold.

Robin turned around immediately to assist Lucina with the few soldiers she was engaging simultaneously. She was doing a masterful job at avoiding their blows so far, but even she couldn't hold out for long against a multitude of opponents. He raised his hand, still crackling with lightning, but stopped himself right before he cast the magic. If he missed his target by just a foot, the lightning could very well strike Lucina by accident. "Lucina!" he screamed. "Duck!"

As soon as she heard his command the princess dropped low to the ground, and the moment she was out of harm's way, Robin released Thoron. The bolt sailed over Lucina's head and struck two of her assailants at once, leaving only one remaining. Lucina sprung to her feet, exploiting her momentum to deliver a powerful upwards slash of Falchion to the remaining man's lower torso. The man slumped to the ground with a dull thud as Robin ran up next to her, panting heavily.

"You... hurt?" he asked.

"No... Just... out of breath..." she huffed, no better than he was. "Where's... my father... and Morgan?"

Robin scanned the battlefield for a moment. "To the left... of those dead trees... See them?"

Lucina paused for a moment to get her breathing back under control. "...Yes. They look like they could use some assistance."

"Let's go," Robin replied, tucking his Thoron tome back inside his coat and replacing it with his Levin Sword once again.

Together they pressed forward toward their daughter, striking down a few more soldiers on their way there. Chrom was quickly darting from enemy to enemy, cutting them down effortlessly with the new powers of the Falchion. Even heavily armored foes weren't shielded by his attacks; after a strike or two, the sword could break any normal armor and leave the soldier's weak points vulnerable to attack. Morgan shadowed him, keeping any enemies trying to ambush Chrom from behind at bay using her Elthunder tome. The girl's eye eventually caught her parents approaching them, and she clearly

became rather excited that they had finally arrived.

"Mother! Father! Over here!" she beckoned, just in case they hadn't seen her. "It's a good thing you're okay! I was starting to worry that one of you had been injured!"

"How are you two holding up?" Lucina asked, running over beside them.

"We're... fine," Chrom grunted, delivering a powerful blow to another Grimleal. "They aren't that difficult to defeat, but there are just so many of them. Have we gained any ground, Robin?"

The tactician looked back into the midst of the fighting, attempting to determine where to call the lines for the two armies. "A little," he replied in frustration. "We're pushing forward, but not fast enough."

"Damn..." Chrom frowned. "We'll never make it to Grima in time at this rate."

"Our forces are about evenly matched right now, but more Grimleal keep coming down from the summit and replacing the fallen," Robin spoke. "We can easily hold out until the majority of their reinforcements are depleted, but if we had higher numbers we could break their ranks and make it to the summit much faster."

"Could we rearrange our troops then, Father?" Morgan asked, striking an enemy dark mage a short distance away with a bolt of Elthunder.

"Wouldn't be as easy now, kiddo..." he responded. "All of our battalions are engaging an enemy fleet and in doing so are keeping the Grimleal separated. If we merged two of our battalions, the enemy will surely do the same. Then we'll be stuck almost evenly matched like before."

"So then what can we do?"

"I don't know yet," Robin admitted, a little ashamed that he didn't have an immediate answer. "I suppose the ideal scenario would be supplementing our own army with more troops, but we don't have any more at our disposal."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that, Sir Robin!"

"Who?" Robin blinked confusedly.

"I know that voice..." Chrom spoke slowly, glancing around him to locate its source.

"Had you forgotten our terms already, Sir Chrom?" An armored pegasus knight descended from the sky and touched down gracefully in front of them, dropping off a dark haired woman in a traditional fighting garb. "I believe I told you when our ways parted that should the country Ylissee ever need aid, Chon'sin will heed her call with only our finest warriors."

"Say'ri!" Chrom smiled.

Morgan tugged at Lucina's cape to get her attention. "Mother?" she asked quietly. "Do you know this person?"

Say'ri heard her and glanced at her direction, looking her over once before speaking. "Hmm... I don't believe we have met, milady. Are you a new recruit to the Ylisseean army?"

"Somewhat," Chrom began to clarify. "This is Morgan, Robin and Lucina's future daughter."

"Of Sir Robin and Lady Lucina? Hmm... I thought I suspected a bond growing between you two," the woman smiled.

"Where did this girl come from though? Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought Lady Lucina was the one from the future."

"She is. Morgan comes from a different future than the one Lucina came from. One just as dark, if not darker..."

"Ah... In any case, I am glad to meet you, Lady Morgan. I am Say'ri, princess of Chon'sin," she bowed with courtesy. "Your parents are both rather remarkable individuals."

"N...Nice to meet you too," Morgan responded, a little unsure of how to react until finally imitating Say'ri's bow back.

"What are you doing here, Say'ri?" Chrom asked once introductions were out of the way. "I thought you still needed to supervise the reconstruction of your nation."

"Aye, I do," Say'ri nodded. "But much work has been completed in my home country since you departed. Once Walhart fell, all of the people he held under his oppression were free. Most of their belongings and money had been taken to fund the Valmese campaign, so they all were eager for work. I hired the best artisans and diplomats on the continent to

assist in rebuilding Chon'sin to its former glory, both literally and politically. It is stable enough now that I do not need to be directly present to supervise all the time. And besides..." She smiled with determination. "How could I be preoccupied with politics when the fate of our very world is at stake and our strongest allies are fighting to save it?"

"So you mean that the entire army of Chon'sin..."

"Is right behind me? Correct," the woman informed. "Every able bodied soldier we could find."

"But how did you know where to find us?"

"You can see these dark clouds all the way from Chon'sin," she gestured up at the sky. "I suspected something was amiss, and my intuition was affirmed a few nights ago when the Divine Dragon herself appeared before me in a dream to tell me that the Fell Dragon had awoken and that she expected you all to arrive here on this very day. The very next morning I assembled our army and we set sail to this island."

"That's fantastic," Robin exclaimed. "Where is your army now?"

"On the other side of the ridge. I came to consult with you before giving the command to attack."

"Then we still have a chance to get to Grima," Robin declared. "Say'ri, I need you to divide your army like we've done and send each portion to assist each one of ours. Whatever you can contribute will be incredibly helpful in destroying the Plegian ranks. Also, would it be possible for you to send out a few pegasus knight to inform only the Shepherds' elite to break away from the fighting and meet at the summit? We need to engage Grima as soon as we possibly can."

"It will be my pleasure, sir," Say'ri responded, leaping back up behind the pegasus knight who had transported her there. "I will let my army know at once!"

"We could ask nothing more, Say'ri," Chrom told her.

"Godspeed, my friends!" she called back as the pegasus took flight. In a matter of minutes, the Chon'sin forces began pouring out onto the battlefield from the other side of the mountain, effectively trapping the Grimleal between two armies.

"We have to take this opportunity!" Chrom commanded, raising his sword. "To the summit!" With his declaration, he began to push forward past the Grimleal ranks and away from the bulk of the fighting with Robin, Lucina, and Morgan close behind. In small groups the other Shepherds emerged from their respective battalions, having received Chrom's order from the Chon'sin pegasus knights. With Say'ri's army preventing the Grimleal from pursuing them, they managed to slip past and begin trekking upwards to meet at the volcano's peak.

As they grew closer and closer to the lingering storm that concealed the Fell Dragon, the weakening effect that Grima emanated slowly intensified. Lucina wouldn't let it show that it was having any visible effect on her in the slightest, but even she could tell that she was growing tired quicker than usual. The feeling would only get stronger and more prominent the longer they were anywhere near the Fell Dragon, and once again the direness of the situation gripped her. They absolutely *had* to succeed.

"We're almost there!" Chrom yelled. "Just a little mor..."

"Father! Move!" Lucina screamed, danger senses that she knew not to question suddenly blaring. She seized Morgan by one arm and Robin by the other, yanking them both backwards.

Chrom didn't have to ask, noticing the danger split second after her and leaping sideways. The light in a small area around them began to collapse in on itself, finally exploding into several purple lightning bolts and a thick cloud of shadowy smoke. When the smoke cleared, a woman on a dark colored pegasus came into view hovering a few yards above them.

"You!" she hissed, Goetia tome crackling in her hands.

"Aversa!" Chrom cried angrily, hurrying back to his feet. "Get out of our way! We have no time for your devilish words or your mind games now!"

"Games? You think I'm playing... games?" Aversa asked coldly, baring her teeth like a cornered animal. Her skin was much paler than usual and her eyes were sunken into their sockets, clear evidence of Grima's effect on her. Her anger superficially gave away to laughter. "No... I'm not the one playing games, little man. This is Grima's game! One where he'll always win! Look around you! He has returned to this world, and his power multiplies by the second! You're just pawns that he's been toying with all this time!"

"No! *You* look around, Aversa!" the Ylissean prince commanded. "Open *your* eyes! Look at this devastation! The extermination of all things living and breathing! This strife! This is the only thing that will come out of Grima's existence! You think that by serving him you'll win his favor? That you'll come out on top? Look at yourself! Grima doesn't care about you, or anyone! If this is Grima's game, you're just as much of a pawn as we are! Surely you've seen by now!"

"Oh, I've seen," the woman replied. "I've seen Grima's apocalypse. The world that he seeks to create is not the one that my master Validar described. It is an endless void that consumes hope and light and replaces it with despair and darkness. It isn't the perfect world."

"Then why do you stand in our way?!" Chrom shouted incredulously. "I asked you before, and I'm going to give you one last chance: stop playing Grima's puppet! Devote what you have left in helping us defeat him! We don't need to be allies, but we can at least work towards a common goal! Why can't you do that?"

"Because there's no hope!" she spat almost desperately. "Nothing can stop Grima! It's impossible! I've devoted my entire existence to following in my master's footsteps and reviving our god. He will drain the life of this world until the day it dies, and I have no choice but to remain by his side until that day comes, no matter what happens to me then!"

"Then you're more narrow-minded than I thought," Chrom shook his head, growing increasingly frustrated with her. "Stop being his slave! Break free from your chains! Don't you believe in change?"

"Change?! I despise it! I long for the days when everything was going according to plan! When everything was perfect and whatever Master Validar said to me was truth!" Aversa screamed. "Murderers! You'll pay for taking him from me!" She raised her right hand high into the air, beginning to summon the fearsome dark magic contained in the ancient tome she held.

Just as she was about to throw it down upon them, an arrow flew through the air and embedded itself deep into her shoulder. She yelped with pain, almost losing her grip on Goetia. Another white coated pegasus soared by, ridden by a particularly loud, blue haired girl.

"Haha, evildoer! Tremble in fear as the mighty Cynthia swoops in heroically to save the day, accompanied by her formidable cohort!" Lucina's younger sister declared triumphantly, gesturing towards her passenger dramatically. Noire was perched right behind her on the saddle, looking absolutely terrified of how high up in the air she was but nonetheless readying another arrow in her bow.

Aversa shouted in agony but paid Cynthia and Noire no mind, instead focusing her attention on Lucina with a hateful glare. "Everything could have gone according to plan! Validar would still be alive and Robin would have accepted the Fell Dragon into his body if it wasn't for you! You ruined everything! A gash in your face isn't enough! Grima will tear you apart, you miserable wretch!"

"Don't. Talk. To *my* mother. Like that!" Morgan yelled with rage, beating her father to action and releasing a tremendously powerful bolt of lightning from her palm. The magic struck her target with such force that it knocked her off her pegasus and sent her plummeting to the ground in front of them. She landed with a thud on the hardened, rocky soil, and gradually her body became very still.

"Ha... Death..." Aversa rasped, thin smile on her face. She didn't seem to be upset at all anymore, nor did she make any attempt to move her limbs. "I would say goodbye... but I suppose... I'll see you all again... soon. Grima will send you... to the place I'm going..."

"We don't have any intention of visiting the terrible place you'll end up in." Morgan relaxed slightly as her sudden burst of anger subsided, though she was still bitter about the woman's insults to Lucina.

Aversa could only laugh weakly. "Haha... I don't know... what lies beyond death... but how I've longed... for its sweet... embrace..." She took one final breath in before the life that left in her vanished.

Chrom took a few steps forward, looking over the Plegian's woman's pale, lifeless body once before scowling and looking away.

"Is... something the matter, Father?" Lucina questioned.

"Did..." he began, pausing to pick the correct words to match what he wanted to say before continuing. "Did I... try hard enough?"

"I don't understand..."

The man sheathed Falchion and crossed his arms. "Do you think I could have changed her mind? Don't take me the

wrong way. She deserved this, and I would have gladly cut her down if it meant that her trickery and evil would finally end, but I feel that Emm would disagree with me..."

Robin shook his head. "She was a lost cause, Chrom..." he replied quietly. "Too far down in Grima's abyss of manipulation and too devoted to my father's goals that she would never have listened to you, no matter what you could have said."

"Aunt Emmeryn couldn't change everyone's minds, Father..." Lucina added. "She couldn't convince the Mad King to stop his cruel tyranny. Some people just can't be reasoned with."

"And did you hear what she said? She wanted to die..." Morgan reminded him.

"I know, but it's just such a waste of a life regardless. If she wanted to die, she could have at least thrown herself at the Fell Dragon. Any help would have been better than none at all," Chrom sighed, gazing skyward. "But what's done is done. All that's left is Grima now."

The white pegasus descended from the sky and hovered a few feet off the ground with Cynthia proudly sitting atop the saddle. "How was that entrance, huh?" she grinned. "Arriving just in time! I saw Aversa coming for you so I took Noire and flew ahead to help!"

"It was rather opportune. Thank you, Cynthia," Chrom smiled. "And thanks to you as well, Noire. You're an excellent shot with that bow."

The girl wasn't expecting praise from Chrom himself and turned very red in the face. "Y...You're welcome, sir! T...Thank you, sir!" she stammered.

"Everyone will be here in a minute, Father!" Cynthia informed him, urging her pegasus a little higher into the air to get a better view around her. "Everyone looks accounted for from up here!"

"That may be the best news we've gotten all day..." the prince spoke. Sure enough, the approaching forms of the Shepherds began to emerge from behind the cliffs.

Out of the storm, a mighty roar like an intensified crash of thunder split the air. The sound was so powerful that it caused the very earth to rumble, disrupting numerous small rocks and causing them to plummet down the mountain. Cynthia's pegasus whinnied nervously and reared back, almost bucking the two girls off its back before its rider could calm it.

"And not a moment too soon..." Lucina gritted her teeth. "The dragon's call..."

"I don't like that sound... It brings back bad memories..." Morgan shivered. "The day I lost my parents... I heard that roar even from Plegia Castle."

Lucina reached out to lightly brush her fingers against the girl's wrist, just to remind her that she was there. Morgan gave her a small smile of thanks, not needing to speak to express her gratitude towards the simple action.

"Chrom! Lucina!" a concerned voice called out as soon as the shaking stopped, and a very anxious-looking Sumia hurried over to them. "Are you alright? That shaking was terrible..."

"We're all fine, Mother," Lucina reassured her. "Maybe a little disoriented, but fine."

"Robin and Morgan too?" She gave both of them a brief visual examination before concluding with a single sigh of relief. "That's good... We're all prepared to go, Chrom."

"I have arrived, friends..." A manakete with radiant white scales slowly glided down and came to rest a few feet away. She wrapped herself up in her own wings, glowing profusely until she assumed her human form. "I apologize for my lateness..." Tiki spoke weakly, taking a few tired steps forward. She stopped, teetered for a moment, and almost fell to the ground before Robin shot his hand out and seized her arm to keep her upright.

"Are you hurt, Lady Tiki?" he asked in concern.

"No... I'm alright, thank you..." she responded, becoming steady enough on her own two feet that Robin could release her. "I do not have any physical wounds... Grima's influence over this place is having a far worse effect on me than all of you... He knows that Naga can take you closer to him, so he is attempting to target me to weaken her presence here..."

"Will you be able to muster the strength to come with us? It may be too dangerous for you in this state," Chrom reminded her.

"I must come... The Divine Dragon will not be able to communicate with you otherwise, but we must hurry..." Tiki urged. "I will call her..." Like before, her eyes closed for a moment, opening with a pale blue glow, and Naga's image appeared before them. Seemingly a reflection of Tiki's strength, the apparition was blurry and unstable, quivering in the winds.

"Awakener... You have made it..." she spoke, voice distant as if she was speaking from far away. "I should be able... to teleport you all onto Grima's back, but my power is faltering here... Grima is blocking me out... I will try to stay with you for as long as I can manage, but I cannot promise you that I will be strong enough until Grima is weakened..."

"That's all we ask, milady," Chrom nodded.

"I must ask you to protect my Voice," she spoke. "She is the only anchor of my presence here... I will grant her as much energy as I can so that she can fight, but she still must be kept away from direct attack."

"We'll keep her safe," the man reassured. "My companions and I are prepared for battle."

"Very well... As you did before, you must concentrate your minds, and I will bring you..." Naga closed her eyes and fell very still as she gathered her energy, air shaking around them. She raised her arms outwards with palms outstretched and emitted a blinding burst of light, cloaking the entire area around them with a wash of white. Suddenly, everything was dead quiet for a few, almost peaceful seconds until the sound returned even louder than before.

Lucina's entire body was struck by a powerful, relentless wind that could have easily blown her off her feet if she hadn't been prepared. The ground beneath her moved back and forth as the Fell Dragon's colossal scales adjusted to every beat of his wings, and his shadowy black hide occasionally visible underneath pulsed with veins of red like a heartbeat. As she recovered her senses, she barely could make out her father's voice piercing through the furious howl of the storm.

"Is everyone okay?!" he shouted, bracing himself from the gale as well. "Did everyone make it?"

A horde of voices sounded out as their response, exact words drowned out but still vaguely recognizable. Lucina could make out her own name in particular, and sure enough it was Robin and Morgan's voices calling from behind her. She turned to give them a visual indication that she was alright, and then scouted around them quickly to determine the exact location of their target. It appeared that they had arrived on the center of the dragon's back, and the base of his neck was far in front of them. Sure enough, the body that the future Robin had lost and Grima now controlled stood there ominously, coat billowing behind him like a cape in the wind.

"Wretched son of Naga..." the Fell Dragon's voice boomed, easily audible over the storm. He sounded even less human than he had in the Dragon's Table now that his true form had awoken, and his voice had degraded into one of snarling, amplified rage. "You have arrived... but your puny efforts all have been for naught..." His tone changed slightly to one more manipulative than aggressive, addressing only one man now. "Robin... I'm offering you one last chance to become one with me and transcend all mortal boundaries. I may even consider allowing your friends to live if you choose correctly... You'll have the power to protect them, Robin... All the power you could ever need would be at your fingertips..."

"Liar..." Robin clenched his teeth. "You'll kill them anyway."

"Well of course I will," Grima affirmed as if he wasn't trying to deceive him at all. "I was merely giving you the chance to surrender to me while still seeming like a hero to all your companions. But you don't want that, do you? Very well... Do you remember the dream I gave you last night?"

Robin didn't respond, but it was clear from his facial expression that he remembered all too well.

"Or should I say your nightmare? Hahaha..." the Fell Dragon chuckled evilly, hissing the words of his next sentence so that they were almost whispers on the wind. "Well... it's about to come true, you know..." His tone became much more angry and hostile towards him in an instant, losing any trace of superficial calmness. "You... pathetic... fool! Even now, staring into the eyes of death, you refuse the power of a GOD?! You think you've strengthened your resolve? You think that you're immune to me with your friends standing beside you? We'll see how long you'll last once they all perish at my hand!" he screamed, raising his hands into the air and clenching his fingers, causing his body began to radiate a thick shadowy aura and emanate dark smoke. The plates on the dragon's back froze, and the pulsing hide underneath glowed faintly. With no warning, hundreds of blazing purple spines made of pure energy shot up out of the dragon's body and impaled the entire army, prompting a collective cry as they were overwhelmed with pain.

"Hgh..." Chrom groaned, hunching over slightly. "With just... one attack... Don't stand... a chance..."

"Gwahahaha! THIS is what real power is!" Grima roared, face sporting a devilish grin. "I appreciate you coming here to personally feed me your life forces. They're quite delicious I must add. So much willpower sapped away in an instant!"

His eyes flashed red and he raised one hand into the air, causing another ring of energy spikes to circle around them. "You think your bonds will save you from this? Look around you, Robin, and realize the truth! You are doomed! I already told you... You've lost them all before, and now you'll lose them all again!"

Robin looked around fervently, and his own pain became nothing to him as he saw each and every one of his friends' agonized faces. Even the mighty Frederick for once looked exhausted from the heavy armor he always wore.

"M...Mom..." Morgan's voice whimpered. "A...Are we... going to d...die? I don't w...want to lose you yet..."

Lucina couldn't come up with any words to respond, not even an empty but reassuring promise, and she locked eyes with Robin, desperately looking for anything from him. She clutched the invisible wound on her chest as the spine retracted from her body and back into Grima's. In her eyes, Robin saw only fear. Untamed, unrepressed fear. The fear that she had been through so much, worked so hard to make things better, and would now fail at the very end of her journey. It was her unspoken answer to Morgan's question: "We are going to die."

And he could do nothing about it. He was paralyzed. He couldn't breathe, but not due to his own physical wounds. It was just like in his nightmare. They may have evaded fate before, altered it, made small changes, but Grima was still going to claim them in the very end. The Mark of Grima on the back of his hand was burning his skin and glowing so brightly that he could see it through his glove. They were trapped, and there was no tactical strategy he could employ to find their way out.

"How does it feel? The feeling of failure?" Grima asked, raising another ring of spines around them. "It must feel all the worse since just moments ago you thought you would prevail... And you, children... Did you actually believe that warning the past of my future would give you leverage over me?" The spines grew closer still, further entrapping them inside. "I transcend time! It is mine to control! I exist in every timeline imaginable, and I've watched you die by my hand countless times! What makes you think this time will be any different?!" The next row of spines was upon them. They pulsed with purple energy, emitting deadly bolts of dark lightning. There was no place left to go. "And Robin... I'll seize your body the moment before death no matter how hard you try to resist me, and I'll push you down so deep into the recesses of your own mind that you'll *never* see this world through your own eyes ever again!"

Grima raised his arms high over his head as he prepared to raise his final attack, but as he did so, the hole in Chrom's Falchion blazed a deep blue. With a burst of sound, it emitted a circular shock wave of light, shattering the Fell Dragon's spines and causing the energy to dissipate. As soon as the light passed through his body, Robin suddenly felt revitalized and strong, like his life had been renewed and given a second chance, and from the looks of things, the other Shepherds were having the same reaction.

"Children of man!" Naga's voice called, image above Tiki's head hardly visible. "I have sealed... Grima's life draining ability, but I can't keep it maintained... for long. I am too weak... to provide you... with any more assistance. Take my power... as your own, and use it to defeat the Fell Dragon!"

"Gyah! Cursed Naga!" Grima hissed maliciously, attempting to raise more energy spines from the dragon's back with no success. "You only prolong their deaths! Your strength is nothing compared to mine! NOTHING! I have other means of wiping these fleas off my back!" He held his hands outstretched at his sides, and with a brief flash he summoned numerous soldiers surrounding the Shepherds on all sides. "My Grimleal! Serve your god and destroy these pests!"

"Awakener..." Naga called out weakly. "Grima's followers... will give you... no respite... Press past them... and stop the Fell Dragon as soon as you are able... before it is too late!" After her final message, her image was too weak to persist and it disappeared.

"You heard her, Shepherds!" Chrom cried, holding the tip of his Falchion trained at Grima's body in the distance. "Ignore the Grimleal unless absolutely necessary! Everyone charge the Fell Dragon now!"

The army let out a reinvigorated battle cry, all fully aware of the tremendous stakes of their task. Refusing to allow their near death experience at Grima's hand to deter them, they charged forward as a single, united mass. Despite moving against the wind and their unstable footing, they managed to clear a significant distance before the Grimleal finally managed to intercept them. Robin and Chrom began belting out commands, stressing above all else that the army had to stick together and cover each other's backs.

Knowing that Naga's seal on Grima's life stealing spines could break at any moment and they would have no chance of victory when it did, Lucina pressed herself to her physical and mental limits. She drove her blade into an axe-wielding Plegian's torso, yanking it free just as Morgan struck the man again with a blast of Elthunder before he had any chance to react. Stepping over a small gap in between Grima's plate armor, she started to rush another approaching foe when a bolt of Thoron from Robin struck him down before he could even reach her. Giving Robin a quick nod of thanks, she chose a new target immediately and performed a leaping strike, bringing Falchion swiftly down the entire length of his

chest. Just as she was about to press further into enemy lines, she heard her father suddenly call out to her.

"Lucina! Fall back!" he commanded urgently.

She didn't question him in the slightest, returning to Robin and Morgan's sides just as she realized Chrom's intentions of calling her back.

"Now it's a clear shot! Now! Nah! Attack!" he yelled out, pointing directly at the spot where Lucina had been.

The two manaketes shot blazing fireballs from their mouths in sync, which exploded into the enemy and inflicting a sizable dent in their ranks.

"Good! Again!"

With Nowi and Nah providing primary frontal support to severely weaken the Grimleal defenses and the front line of assault picking off any survivors, the army began to steadily advance as a unit. Lissa, Maribelle, and Brady kept to the center of the group with Tiki and quickly healed any minor wounds with their staves before pain could even come into effect while their flying riders dominated the skies, preventing any sort of Grimleal aerial attack. The distance between them and Grima shortened still, and their rapid progress was causing him to grow incredibly impatient.

"ENOUGH!" he bellowed over the clamor of the fighting. "This little crusade ends NOW!" He raised one hand, and his dragon form began to lift its mighty neck and turn its head around so that it was facing them. The dragon's six eyes focused on the man leading the charge, and the creature opened its sharp-toothed jaws wide and howled with a deafening roar of anger. "I WILL ANNILATE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU!" Grima screamed. The plates that extended from both sides on the dragon's neck began to undulate rapidly, picking up speed as a dull purple energy began to grow deep inside the Fell Dragon's throat.

"He's about to attack! Scatter!" Chrom commanded. The army split into smaller fractions in an attempt to make Grima's aim slightly more difficult, but it immediately became clear that Chrom was his first and foremost target. Dark energy continued to amass in the dragon's mouth, building up for a devastating attack. Chrom ran to avoid the oncoming blast radius, but escape was impossible.

"Father!" Lucina yelled desperately, unable to do anything to stop the imminent destruction.

"Chrom!" Without thinking about what he was doing, Robin raised his hand towards the dragon's head with palm open, however he didn't release any magic. He clenched his teeth tightly together, and numerous lines of strain etched their way across his face as he channeled all his focus towards his willpower. Grima's jaws seemed to shake slightly as if two opposing forces were fighting for control of them. Just as the monster was about to release its attack, Robin squeezed his eyes shut and shouted with determination. At the very last moment, Grima's head suddenly tilted upwards, and the shadowy fireball that he released missed his target, sailing clear over Chrom's head and exploding into a group of Grimleal soldiers, vaporizing them instantly.

"Robin..." Chrom began, eyeing him with awe. "How did you..."

The man looked at his own hands in shock, not entirely sure what he had done himself. "I...I don't know... I just raised my hand without thinking..."

"You... you controlled him, Robin..." Lucina spoke with disbelief.

"WHAT?!" Grima bellowed with rage, glaring at Robin with the slightest tint of concern. "You! You shouldn't be able..."

A sudden realization appeared in Robin's eyes. "...If you can influence my actions... and you and I are one and the same... what's to stop me from influencing yours?!"

"NO! I am in control! I am YOUR god, and YOU submit to ME! It's time I show you a place where you'll be all alone, where NOBODY can save you!" His body pulsed once with his dark aura, and a black cloud of shadow began to envelop the tactician's body, cloaking him from view.

"Robin!" Lucina cried, hand darting out and seizing his upper arm tightly. "I'm not leaving you again!" She squeezed her eyes shut and instinctually pulled herself closer to wrap her other arm around his waist, and suddenly, they were gone. Like it had when Naga had teleported them onto Grima's back, the sound all around them fell absolutely silent, but it didn't return.

"Lucina..." she heard him speak quietly after a few moments. She slowly opened her eyes and lifted her head from Robin's sleeve. She looked around to find that her father, the Shepherds, Grima, the world... had disappeared, and it was

all replaced with black. An inky darkness in every possible direction so vast and hollow that it hurt her brain a little to even look into it. Everything was gone, except the man she held tightly in her arms. Despite the darkness, she could see him as clear as if he was standing in direct sunlight.

"Why did you let Grima take you too?" he asked.

"Because he won't make you feel alone anymore," Lucina responded firmly. She gradually released his waist but kept one firm hand on his arm, deathly afraid that she would lose him to the darkness if she let go. "He separated us in the Dragon's Table when I told you I would stay with you, and I wasn't about to let him separate us again. I need you to know that you aren't fighting him alone, Robin. Wherever you are." She glanced around one more time just to make sure that nothing else had materialized in darkness. "Where... are we, exactly?"

"Hmm..." Robin closed his eyes and thought for a moment. "Some kind of mental barrier..." he replied. "Grima extended a portion of his own mind to trap us inside. I'll try and figure out a way to get us out..."

"...Robin?"

"Yes?"

"I still can't believe it..." she told him, still trying to comprehend what she had seen happen. "You controlled Grima!"

"Not controlled, I don't think..." Robin shook his head. "It was more like gave him a firm suggestion. I couldn't make him stop his attack. All I did was make his head tilt upwards just a little bit..."

"Regardless! You know as well as I do that if you didn't do that, my father would have died! His attack missed! How in Naga's name did you know how to do it? You've never told me you could do that!"

"I didn't know until just now," he shrugged apologetically. "I just saw Grima's attack coming and knew it was going to hit Chrom. Somewhere in my mind I found where the dragon and I are linked, and I... just sort of commanded him to move his head."

"This is... This is amazing!" Lucina exclaimed, smile growing on her face as she grew excited. "See? You're not just as strong as him! You're stronger! He can't control you anymore, and you turned the tables completely around on him like the master tactician you are! If we can just get out of here, we'll have secured a victory! If you just hold off his attacks long enough for my father to get close to him, then we... we can beat him! We can win, Robin! We'll send him back to sleep, and then we can finally focus on what we want to make with our lives! Have you given it any thought, Robin? I don't even know where to start!"

The man winced at her question, not looking anywhere near as excited as she thought he would be. Instead of smiling, he angled his head away slightly and averted his gaze.

Lucina frowned, looking at him strangely. "...Robin? Is... something the matter?"

"Lucina... I..." he began, trying to choose his words very carefully. "I can't... let... Grima... go back... to sleep..."

"W...What do you mean? That's... that's what we've been working towards this whole time!" she responded anxiously. "You... want him to live?"

"That isn't... what I mean..." the man attempted to explain, knowing that what he was about to say wouldn't be easy for her in any context. "I mean that... asleep or not... I just... can't allow Grima to live on one more day, Lucina. I have to strike him down. I have to kill him."

"No... No, you don't, Robin. We already discussed this," she told him, trying to maintain calm as her eyes flooded with fear. "N...No! You don't have to!"

"But after I've truly seen with my own eyes what Grima is capable of doing to the world and everyone living in it, I realize now that the only way to purge his evil completely is to destroy him... For good," Robin made an attempt to reason with her. "You don't understand, Lucina... I *need* to do this."

"I... don't understand? I don't understand?!" Lucina asked, anger suddenly boiling over. "You think I don't understand what Grima is capable of?! Well I know perfectly well! I've seen horrors that he's committed that you could never even *begin* to imagine, Robin! I've seen fellow soldiers be ripped apart by Risen, only to be revived by Grima's spells as another undead monster for his army! Do you know what it feels like to have to cut down someone who just moments ago was fighting by your side as your friend? Do you know what it's like to see your own bones through your skin after going more than a week without food? Do you know what it's like... to find a once thriving little village reduced to rubble

and see the lives of *everyone* there... taken away by the Fell Dragon? Children, elders, mothers with their little babies... still in their arms?!" Her eyes were tearing up. She was recalling too many horrible memories at one time. "No! You don't understand!"

"Lucina..." Robin pleaded, eyes hurt.

"Don't 'Lucina' me!" she commanded, trying as hard as she possibly could to stay angry while tears rolled down her face. "If you do this, you'll die! You'll die!"

The man made a pained expression and put a hand behind her head, firmly pulling her close.

"Robin, stop! Don't... do this to me!" She struggled against him but his grip was too strong and she couldn't muster up any strength to fight him.

"I know what the consequences are..." he told her quietly.

"Then why? Why do you still want to do this?" Lucina asked desperately, unable to keep her anger going any longer and allowing it to crumble away into despair. "...I don't understand..."

"Because this may be the only chance the world will ever get at this. This may be the only way to destroy Grima for the rest of time!" Robin spoke. "I was born with this power, Lucina... I am the sole product of hundreds and hundreds of years of Grimleal work to create a perfect vessel for Grima, and our hearts are bound together so indescribably close that I have the ability to kill him as if he killed himself. There may never again be another person that shares this same trait with me, no matter how hard the Grimleal attempt to purify the Fell Bloodline again. We as humans have one shot at this."

"Y...You want to be a hero? Is that all this is?" Lucina cried. "You want your name to be in every history book ever written from now on as the person who died killing the Fell Dragon?"

"Lucina, you know that isn't true... I don't care if some historian doesn't even remember my name. In truth, I would actually prefer them to say that Chrom killed the Fell Dragon. I want the Exalted Bloodline to be remembered as the ones who saved the world, not as warmongers like your grandfather. I want to finish your mission, Lucina. I'll set everything right."

"I don't care! I don't care about my mission anymore!" she insisted.

"The Lucina I know would stop at nothing to defeat Grima," the man reminded her. "Your goal for years has been to destroy him, and I know you can't just give up on what you've worked for that long in an instant..."

"Destroying Grima was not my goal, Robin! It was never my goal! My goal was to *prevent* him from returning to this world, and if he did manage to reawaken, put him back to sleep. I knew Grima could never be killed!"

"But now he can!" Robin held her just far enough away so that he could look into her eyes. "He *can* be killed for good, and I can do it! Tell me with complete honesty: if you knew when you came to this time that by sacrificing just one man that Grima could be wiped off this world forever, would you have done it?"

Lucina hesitated. Would she have? Again her shame stemming from the night she tried to kill him reared its ugly head. "P...Perhaps..." she admitted slowly, but quickly continued. "But things have changed now! I'm not the same as when I first came here, and it's all because of you, Robin! How could I sacrifice the one man I care for more than anything else when I know there's another way? I...I love you, Robin!" she choked out. "I can't lose you again! There's another way! Let my father deal the final blow! Please!"

The man solemnly shook his head no, looking pained to be doing so. "Lucina... Think of all the people I could save... Not just in this timeline, but in others! Every future from here on out could be devoid of Grima's presence! No one would have to suffer from his destruction anymore..."

"Everyone except me, Robin... I've g...given my heart t...to you... I can't... live without you... by my side anymore... I'll be incomplete forever..." she sobbed. "Do I mean anything to you anymore?" she asked desperately. "Does our love mean anything to you anymore? Does our family mean anything to you anymore? Who cares about everyone else? They aren't us! Be selfish, Robin! Be selfish for once in your life!"

He tightened his grip on her, impassioned by her questions. "Lucina! You and Morgan mean everything to me, and I'm the luckiest man in the world to have you both! I'll never stop caring about you! Never question that again!"

"So then let my father put Grima to sleep! If Morgan and I mean everything to you, then stay with us!"

"Lucina, I have to do this *because* you and Morgan are my everything!" he insisted. "My family... is the most precious thing I have, and it's for this reason that you have to look into the future with me, Lucina. Chrom may be able to put Grima back to sleep, but for how long? Maybe Grima doesn't come back in our lifetime, and maybe not in Morgan's, but what about Morgan's children? Her children's children? What if Grima comes back and tears our future family apart again? What if our great grandchildren have to go through what you had to when you were a little girl?"

"I would never wish that pain upon anyone..." Lucina winced, still trying to counter Robin's arguments in any way she could. "But what if Grima doesn't come back for a thousand years? Two thousand years? What if by the time he returns, mankind will have disappeared?"

"But what if he doesn't?" he asked quietly. "I can't take that risk, Lucina. My conscience won't allow it. Even if Grima is asleep, I'll still be able to feel his presence. The mark on the back of my hand will be a constant reminder of the choice I didn't make and the lives I could have potentially saved. I'll never be able to live with myself..." He was trying as hard as he could to maintain some sense of calmness for her, but could tell she still wasn't happy with any of his reasoning. "Lucina, please..." he begged. "This isn't an easy decision for me to make... If anything, you have to know that..."

"Then don't do it..." Lucina begged, slowly realizing that she wasn't changing his mind. "D...Don't..."

Robin looked away for a few seconds into the void around them, as if it would reveal some other solution. "...This decision is for you, Lucy," he spoke, using the nickname affectionately in an attempt to make her more responsive to his words. "I want... to create that world of peace you dream of. And maybe someday... if I rid this world of a great evil now, there will be more places like that grotto you described to me. One untouched by war, by strife, by sorrow... and one where people can be... happy. I've been thinking... about what I said under Grima's influence in those scenes Naga showed us from Morgan's future, and I suppose not everything I said about what I felt was a complete lie... My whole life that I remember I've seen people fighting one another, killing one another because they think it's the only way. I need to do this to show all those people that peace is stronger than war. It may not happen right away, and it probably won't, but maybe, just maybe I show them the path to get there." He paused, hesitant. "Does that... sound okay to you?"

"It... sounds beautiful..." she sniffed. Even after knowing him for so long she still was moved by what he really was trying to accomplish. "Y...You want to do... so much... for people you don't even know... For people who are your enemies... Why?" she asked quietly. "They don't owe you anything, Robin..."

"...To prove Grima wrong..." he responded after a moment's consideration. "To prove myself wrong. He may have been influencing what I was saying, but maybe somewhere deep down inside me I really believed that if the world... t...took you from me, then the world was irredeemable... I want to prove that the world still has a chance. That mankind still has a chance to choose what they want the world to be like, and I have to do this now because... because I can do it! For once in my life, Lucina, I can use my cursed power to do something good! I'm... I'm strong enough to protect you! For once in my life, I have a purpose!" He started to tear in the corners of his eyes. "My purpose is to protect my family, the people I love the most! I'm strong enough to create a world where a tear never has to run down your cheek again, and one where you can be happy! And I'd give anything up, everything I own, what little money I have, every tactical accomplishment to my name, my life, to make that world become real."

"Y...You're doing this so that... so that I'll never have to cry again... b...but I can't stop..." she wept. "I...I'm sorry... I feel so selfish... You're d...doing this for... for everybody in the whole world, and I'm s...stopping you because I want you for myself..."

"Don't feel that way, Lucy..."

"Robin... I have to know... When I asked you last night... to think about... what we would do together after today... did... you know? Did you know... that you were going to sacrifice yourself the whole time... before even asking Naga, and didn't tell me?"

Robin looked defeated. "I... thought... there might be consequences for me if I did this, but I didn't tell you... because I knew you would try to convince me otherwise..."

His answer made a single, uncontrollable sob to run through her body. "You've made up... your mind... I...I won't... stop you anymore..." she reluctantly conceded. "I j...just have one more question for you... before... b...before..." she stammered, unable to bring herself to say the word. "Before you go... What... will I do? W...What's left for me?" she whispered. "You make it seem like... like I'm just going to... forget about you and go on living my misplaced life... I can't, Robin. I can never forget you..."

"Hey..." the man smiled, gently placing his thumb underneath her chin to lift it up. "We're making it seem like I'm leaving forever, aren't we? I'm sorry if it sounded that way, because I don't plan on being gone for long, Lucy. I'm coming back. Remember what Naga said?"

"B...But Naga said that... that the chances of you coming back are... infinitesimally small..." she sniffed, making a tremendous effort to calm herself.

"But remember what else she said? If the bond I share with Grima is weaker than the bonds I've created for myself with the people of this world, then I'll stay tethered here," he reminded. "Do you think that the bond that we share is strong? I don't know about you, but I think it's going to take a lot more than one measly dragon to break it. More than ten. More than a hundred. Maybe a thousand Fell Dragons could match just a *teensy* bit of it," he joked and pinched the air with his fingers, trying to make her smile.

"Not even close," she corrected, corners of her lips upturning just enough to be noticeable.

"Yeah, that's what I thought too. Not even close," he smiled wider. "And Naga says it's almost impossible? What am I?"

"The craziest, most brilliant tactician the world has ever known?"

"Exactly! And isn't it the job of a crack tactician to do the impossible? I mean, didn't they say it was impossible for someone to find a way to defeat an entire fleet with superior naval power double the size of ours in an instant?" He leaned his head in a little closer to hers and raised his eyebrows exaggeratedly. "Guess who did? This guy."

Lucina giggled at his expression, exactly what he had been going for. "By torching half our own ships that probably cost innumerable amounts of gold to build?"

"That's me," Robin grinned. "Also the same guy who lead an entire army into an active, lava-filled volcano on purpose. I've probably lead us into closer scathes with death than this one before. And this time, I have a greater motivation to live than anything else: I get to see you again."

Lucina's laughter was short-lived, and almost immediately she was back on the verge of tears again. "But how long, Robin? When will you come back, and where? What if you do come back, but you're on the other side of the world? How will I know? How will I know when you come back to me?"

The superficial grin gradually slipped off of his face. "... I don't... know..." he admitted. "But I'm sure my heart will lead me back to where I belong, and if I have any say in how long I'm gone for, I'm going to say maybe a week. Maybe two weeks tops. I don't plan on being gone for much longer than that. Just... just think of it like how I left after what happened in Plegia Castle. Just like that."

His example didn't seem too reassuring to her. "But every minute you were gone, I missed you more... H...How can you promise me you'll be back? Because... because if you are... going to leave me, I need a sign you'll come back soon... I need something, anything..."

He considered her question for a while before deciding. "How about... I give you this?" he asked, sliding his arms out of the sleeves of his coat, removing his Thoron tome from inside, and folding it up into a neat little square.

"Your coat?" Lucina asked, a little surprised by his decision. She assumed he would come up with some words to convince her. "But... this is... *your coat*. This is your signature thing. You're always in this..."

"Which is exactly why I want you to hold on to it until I come back. If anything, I've got to come back for this, because what's a tactician without his coat?" he smiled. "I'll admit I can't leave behind much for you, but this old thing is part of who I am, tea stain and all."

"Tea stain..." she echoed, taking the coat from him and holding it delicately, brushing her fingers against the corner where she had spilled that tea on it. The texture of the fabric on the stained area differed just enough than the texture of the normal fabric that she could identify where the stain was by touch alone. "...Oh! I know it seems a little... pathetic on my part... but do you need this more than I do? To remember me?"

Robin shook his head. "I used to, but not anymore. I'm stronger than I was back then, remember? I won't need my coat to remember you anymore, because nothing could ever make me forget. But... what I will need is an image. Not an actual one. Just one to remember above all others. One to hold on to, so for that reason... could you smile for me, Lucina?" he asked. "Just once. Just as a reminder of the thing that from this point forward I've devoted my life to protect?"

Lucina thought it would be impossible to muster a genuine smile for him right now, but all she had to do was remember almost any memory she had shared with him and in no time at all, a smile stretched wide across her lips. She hardly even realized that she was making one until she saw Robin match her smile with one of his own. "...How was that?"

"Perfect," Robin told her happily. "I'm not forgetting that one anytime soon. ...Have I ever told you how beautiful your smile is?"

"A couple times actually..."

"I thought so. I just feel the need to periodically remind you because of how much it brightens my day. Seeing you smile is, what I feel at least, a privilege for me, not just because it makes me happy, but because I know *you're* happy and that the memories from your past aren't bothering you and that the stoic persona you feel like you need to keep up around people isn't worrying you. *That's* the second thing I wanted to ask of you, Lucina," the man told her. "I want you to remember to smile. I don't want you to be sad while I'm gone. Please do the best you can to stay happy... Don't forget, okay?"

"O...Okay... I'll... I'll try..." she responded, still not certain as to how he thought she could be happy without him by her side. "I'll try..."

Robin frowned, easily recognizing by her tone that she wasn't too confident in what she was saying, and his tone became much more serious in an instant. "Lucina... Look at me," he urged, taking her by the shoulders and making her look into his eyes. "Do you... trust me?" he asked, voice firm.

She stared at him blankly, not expecting the question. He had never asked something like it before. She had never given her trust completely to anyone since her parents died. It was just too dangerous to do so. But this man was different. After everything they had been through together, all the laughs and all the tears, he was the only one she would give her life to and be sure he would protect it until the very end. But she was still conflicted with her answer. If she lied and said no, would he stay? Or did she tell him the truth and let him go? "Yes... I...I trust you, Robin..." she professed at last. "With all my heart... I trust you."

The man looked incredibly relieved. "Then believe me when I say I won't be gone forever. I still have too much left to protect here, don't I?" He reached up and caressed her cheek gently with one hand. "I promise you that you haven't made a mistake giving your trust away, Lucina," he whispered. "I'll be back before you know I'm gone. Work on that list of everything we'll do together, because as soon as I come back we're doing all of it." He slid his hand behind her head, easing her into a soft kiss. "I love you."

Lucina didn't have to say it back. He knew from the way she held him up against her that she meant it too.

"Now let's get out of here, shall we?" he asked. "We can't think about what comes next for us if we're stuck in this place." He looked around him, concentrating on something Lucina couldn't see. "Hold on tight, okay? I don't want to leave you here." Lucina reluctantly released his torso, settling for a firm grip on his left arm. Robin smiled at her with reassurance, and then lifted his right hand high into the air, placing his palm against an invisible wall that hadn't been there before. He closed his eyes tightly, and the Mark of Grima on the back of his hand glowed intensely as he concentrated. From the spot he had placed his hand, a tiny crack appeared in the darkness, and with every passing second it grew, fracturing the void with lines of light. Robin's eyes shot open, and the darkness that enveloped them shattered like glass into hundreds of tiny pieces that blew away in the wind.

The moment the barrier was destroyed, all the sound filled the emptiness and suddenly they were on the dragon's back again. They had reappeared slightly in front of the rest of the Shepherds, closer to Grima's body. Robin looked a little tired from the endeavor, but he did his best to repress it. The Fell Dragon was immediately aware of what he had done and directed all of his attention on him.

"What?! How did you..." he asked in bewilderment, seething with frustration. "Impossible! My grip CANNOT be broken!"

"You're going... to have to try... harder than that," Robin spoke in between breaths, flashing a confident grin at the end of his sentence to mock him.

Grima's eyes gleamed lividly, and his body shivered in anger. "YOU! I WILL DESTROY YOU, MORTAL!" He raised his hand again, and his dragon form's head tilted back as he charged another energy burst.

As Robin did before, he raised his hand outwards towards the Fell Dragon's gaping jaws and concentrated hard. For a moment, man and dragon were locked in a battle of will and neither side seemed to be directly in control until Robin managed to force Grima's head to turn to the side as he exhaled the dark fireball. The energy missed them entirely, sailing past the dragon's back and exploding into the ocean far below.

Grima roared with increasing frustration, voice temporarily degrading into snarls and growls until he brought himself back under control. "GRIMLEAL!" he bellowed as he charged yet another attack. "DESTROY HIM!"

"Lucina!" Robin turned to her with urgency. "I can hold Grima's attacks off, but I may not be able to focus on both that and defending myself against the Grimleal. Could I ask you to fight by my side, and end this war together?"

Knowing that now was not the time for emotions, Lucina put on the hardened, serious persona she knew so well and nodded sharply. "It would be an honor," she declared, unsheathing her Falchion and holding it ready while still clutching Robin's folded coat tightly to her chest with her other hand.

"Now!" Robin cried. "We attack!"

They ran forward as one, with Lucina keeping pace slightly ahead of him so that any oncoming soldiers would have to go through her first. A Grimleal barbarian charged them, brandishing his axe menacingly before attempting to bring it down on her. Lucina raised her blade up to catch the axe mid-swing and then moved her blade in an arc-like path down, essentially guiding the axe down to the ground beside her. Recovering immediately, she thrust Falchion through his mostly unarmored upper torso, and without pulling the blade out, she swung it to the side. The barbarian stumbled as she dragged him, colliding with another oncoming soldier and knocking him down. Lucina yanked Falchion free and reassumed her attack stance as she continued running.

Their pace was sporadic at best, for every time Grima was about to unleash another attack, Robin had to slow to almost a halt to focus on turning it away. Lucina had to linger and defend him in such a vulnerable state until he recovered and then had to break past the soldiers that had accumulated around them while they waited. Even still, they were steadily getting closer, and the closer they got, the more Grima's concern became evident. As they neared him however, a few of Grima's energy spines started erupting from the his back, beginning to surround his body. Once they had gotten past most of the soldiers, Robin halted, causing Lucina to stop as well and fall back near him.

"The seal that Naga put on Grima's spines is breaking," Robin told her. "Any moment now and he'll have total control of them again. It's too dangerous for you past this point. I have to go on alone from here."

His words made her freeze, even though she knew they would have to part at some time or another. She wasn't ready yet. She said she would be able to handle him leaving but she couldn't now that it was actually happening. But he was already walking forward. Walking away. She reached out to grab him, pull him back and make him stay with her, and just barely grasping her fingertips around his. "Robin!" she called his name, fear evident in her voice. "D...Don't! Don't go!"

Robin's eyes became sad, smile on his face gentle and reassuring. "I'll see you soon, love," he spoke softly. "Tell Morgan what I told you, and that I love her dearly. I'll miss you until we meet again..." He slipped his fingers away, keeping eye contact with her for as long as he could. "...In a world of peace... and a better life..." And he broke his gaze and turned away. He kept walking. He left her standing there, rooted to the spot, frozen in time. She could only watch now, and her grip on his coat tightened.

Robin couldn't bring himself to look back, so he glared ahead, focusing in on the monster who caused his family and friends so much pain and suffering. Showing no hint of fear anymore, he continued walking forward. His entire life had led up to this moment, this action. This was why he had been born. Not to fall to Grima, but to destroy him.

The Fell Dragon shouted, wildly throwing his arms up as he summoned dozens of spines around himself for protection in an attempt to block off Robin's path.

Robin however was unfazed by the action, bring his hand down and causing the spines in front of him to retreat inside the dragon's back. Grima continued to raise more and more defenses as he began to grow desperate, but he was unable to even stall the man's progress.

Lucina could hear the Shepherds nearing her from behind. They were able to clear out mostly all the Grimleal once Grima had stopped focusing his primary attention on them. They didn't seem to realize what exactly was happening at first, but as soon as it clicked they began to call for him. Only once or twice at first, but soon the air was filled with his name, beckons to come back and stay with them that Robin either didn't hear or didn't listen to, likely the latter.

"Father!" Lucina heard Morgan's voice scream sharply, and the girl would have sprinted past her if Lucina didn't grab her by the lowered cowl of her coat and pull her back beside her. "Mother! No!" she begged as she tried to free herself from Lucina's grip, brown eyes wide with terror. "We need to stop him! Father is going to die! Let me go!"

"It's too dangerous, sweetie," Lucina replied, sharing Morgan's fear but making an enormous attempt to hide it. She wrapped her arms around the girl so that she couldn't run after him and potentially into one of Grima's deadly spines. "H...He's made up his mind... He's going to destroy Grima..."

"No no no!" Morgan cried, still straining against her. "Father! Come back! Don't leave me again! P...Please!"

Having to ignore his daughter's pleas for him to return were almost unbearable, and for a second Robin considered changing his mind and going back to his family. ...But he had to do this for them. No longer would Grima make Lucina suffer the burden of trying to defeat him and threaten to corrupt Morgan's fragile mind any more than he already had. He

opened his Thoron tome with one hand, muttering one continuous spell underneath his breath as he continued to clear a path through Grima's spines for himself. All of the pages of the tome began to glow, and as they vanished into thin air one by one, his hands began to radiate a bright aura and emit tiny sparks.

"Robin! By the gods! Get back here!" Chrom yelled as he ran up next to Lucina and Morgan. "What in the seven hells is he doing?!"

"He's going to stop the war..." Lucina whispered in response, practically inaudible over the storm and Morgan's shouts.

The last pages of Thoron vanished, and once they did, the entire cover of the tome crumbled away into dust. Having called upon all of the tome's magic at once, an incredibly risky maneuver on his part, his hands and arms were cloaked in white and now released small but full-fledged lightning bolts at random as the energy overflowed from his body. He was within a mere few yards of Grima now. Too late to turn back. He stopped walking. Grima stopped raising spines. They said nothing for a moment, simply staring each other down.

"Grima..."

"Robin..." the Fell Dragon smirked, tone changing suddenly from frustrated and hateful to calm and manipulating. "You are angry, but towards whom, or what? Are you angry at me, or are you angry at this lost cause of this world? ...You have made the right decision, coming directly to me. Finally you desire to submit your body to serve as my vessel in this world, and I gladly accept."

"You and I both know that isn't true," Robin replied bluntly.

"You must feel quite confident, don't you? Making it all the way here, evading my every attack..." He paused. "Do you know why you have these powers all of a sudden? Why you can control my attacks? It's quite obvious now that I think about it. It is not because you are stronger than I, no... My soul is growing within you since my awakening and is slowly adopting my powers. It seeks to become one with its master!"

"Try all you want to control my mind," Robin challenged. "You have no dominion over me anymore."

"Hahaha... Where is the fear in your voice?" the Fell Dragon asked. "It troubles me that you have no fear in the face of destruction. Have you become devoid of petty human emotions yet and become the monster you truly are?"

"I'm scared," the man corrected. "I'm very scared, in fact, but not of you. I'm afraid of what kind of awful, miserable hell you're going to wind up in."

"Do you *know* what immortal means?" Grima hissed. "You cannot kill what may never die! But you, human... You are mortal, and you can die most painfully... That I can reassure you..." His hand sizzled with dark magic, and he stood poised to strike. "You shall gaze upon the very future you fought to prevent, and then you will know what fear is!" He immediately took one step forward, and with an extended hand and pulse of smoke he fired a wicked bolt of purple lightning from his palm.

Robin mirrored his pose, but instead of attacking himself, he simply stood with only his hand out to protect himself. The dark lightning struck his palm and reacted with the magic surrounding Robin's hand, triggering a massive explosion. Grima stumbled backwards a few steps, but Robin didn't flinch from the blast at all.

"Grima!" he growled. "The atrocities you've committed upon this world and others will be rectified today, and your shadow will never again loom over my friends and family! Die now, so that their future may live!" With a shout, he channeled the vast amounts of energy stored inside him and released it through both his hands, striking the Fell Dragon with twin bolts of Thoron.

Grima jerked back with shock upon impact, almost losing his footing. "HRAGH!" he screamed, glaring at Robin with his murderous, red eyes.

Robin held the magic steady, flooding the Fell Dragon's body with a continuous stream of lightning. The effort was already taking its toll on his body, but he refused to let the exhaustion get the better of him. Thinking about the people he had left behind to save gave him strength. "You devastated the land... You tore families apart... You killed a man's wife, corrupted his daughter, and are keeping his own tortured soul trapped inside your foul mind, and for that, I will destroy you!"

The plates on the dragon's body began to shake, and the hide underneath started to pulse red at a steadily increasing interval like a quickening heart rate. Its head thrashed side to side above them and roared in pain as the bony armor that made up its jaws started to fracture.

Morgan was tormented by the mental link she shared with her father and clutched her head tightly, legs going almost numb and relying on Lucina to hold her up. Just like her father's, her Mark of Grima on her left hand was glowing an intense purple. "Dad is dying!" she wailed. "Dad is dying Dad is dying Dad is dying!"

Lucina was helpless. There was nothing she could do but watch.

Grima's body was trembling uncontrollably from Robin's attack, and the tips of his white hair started to singe. He struggled to full height, taking a single, small step forward against Robin's might. "You... you think... that this... will FREE YOU?!" he cried. "That... that we can be... SEPARATED?!" There was a thundering sound as the dragon's bony jaws snapped off, exposing the Fell Dragon's true face underneath. Instead of draconian, it was human-like in appearance with an unhinged lower jaw. The face lowered closer to them, six red eyes positioned where the face's ears should have been and all focused on the tactician. As it became more visible, it was unquestionable that Grima's face was a shining metal mask of Robin's, features identical to his but with empty eye sockets. The monstrosity roared, shaking the sky. "YOU WILL NEVER BE FREE!" Grima bellowed. "I AM YOU!"

"Then it's only fitting that we go down *together*!" Robin shouted, pouring every last reserve of magic he had left into one final blast of lightning that sent Grima reeling backwards. The entire dragon shook, six wings flailing wildly about in the air and entire body rapidly pulsing red as its heart rate reached critical levels.

The Fell Dragon collapsed to his knees, too weak to stand. "N...NO! I...I CANNOT DIE!" He looked at his own body in horror as it began to flake away into tiny pieces of dust, exposed core underneath releasing wisps of shadow that were carried away by the wind. "T...THIS... SHOULDN'T BE!" he cried, moving his hands as if to claw at his remains. "MY FUTURE..."

"Has been unwritten..." Robin completed his sentence with finality.

Grima fell silent and looked up at him, red eyes growing dim until they were almost, just barely brown again, and what was left of his body succumbed in an instant. There was no explosion, no blast of light. He just... vanished.

Robin stared at the spot where he had been for a few seconds before finally turning back to face all the people whom he had fought alongside for years with. They were all alive. They had won. The happiness of seeing them all together and now forever safe from the Fell Dragon felt warm inside his chest, but he also was experiencing something he had never felt before. It was cold, counteracting the warmth of happiness and making him feel very tired. Just then, he felt a tingling sensation in his legs, and when he looked down he found that his own feet were dissolving away into little particles of dust. It didn't shock him, for he expected it to come, and did not panic. In fact, he felt rather calm, but there was one more thing he had to do before he left, and he picked out Lucina in the center of the crowd.

Lucina was watching him leave her. By now, his entire legs had vanished, leaving only his upper torso suspended in mid-air. She locked eyes with him, expression a mixture of fright and complete helplessness. Robin smiled at her. It was the soft, understanding smile that he seemed to use only for her. He slowly reached up with his right hand and tapped his forehead a few times, and then pointed towards his upturned lips. It was a reminder. *Remember to smile.*

His torso was disappearing now. He only had a few seconds left. He was waiting for something that only she could give him. Lucina offered a smile back. She had to force it. Everything in her was telling her to break down, but she kept that last smile on just for him. He smiled wider, giving her a small nod and a reassuring look. He raised his hand up, palm facing them all, and gave a short wave goodbye before what was left of his arms dissolved.

Lucina watched his shoulders go, and then his neck. And then went his smile. And then went his warm, auburn brown eyes. And then he died.

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